

roman colours

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by [riteofconfession](#)

Summary

Will is about to finish medical school and is assigned to Johns-Hopkins for his residency. Dr. Lecter is the accomplished, reliable surgeon for the ER who always gets what he wants.

or the one where Will is anxious about being a doctor and the rough transition leaves him spiraling out of his depth, scrambling for something to hold onto. Hannibal is more than willing to oblige.

Notes

salutaire (adj), middle French: of benefit, or benefitting

salutaire

On a list of very few, Baltimore is an anticipated change. May had been a month full of nail-biting, underage drinking, and uncontrollable crying for the medical students at Louisiana State. The university's medical dorms turned into a mausoleum; students were either crashing in the labs, passed out on the commons, or standing outside the department head's office, staring sadly at the windows. Much to Dr. Crawford's dismay, his office is made entirely of glass on one side. Every time he looks up, he is met with a hoard of wide-eyed medical students gazing unblinking into his office. Finally, he snaps and closes the blinds.

"I just want to know where I'm going!" Jimmy Price exclaims, pressing both palms against the glass as the white panels slide together. Dr. Crawford mimics him before dropping the exaggerated expression, jabbing a decisive finger at the glass. Will Graham stifles a startled laugh as he watches Brian comfort his friend. Residencies are a nightmare. Not all residencies are created equal. If you are one of the lucky few selected for hospitals like Mayo Clinic or Massachusetts General, your pay is much higher than what a middle- or bottom-tier hospital residency will ever think about giving you. It's practically a dice roll trying to guess where you're going, or even which *state*. Compared to this, waiting for MCAT results was relaxing.

The group of students disperses, low grumbling collecting around them. Beverly glances up at Will, mouth twisting into a half-smile.

"You know, you seem almost...*not* worried about this. What's wrong with you?"

He offers her a forced smile, squinting awkwardly into the sunlight slating in through the exit doors.

"I'll be lucky if I even pass this semester," he says, folding his arms over his chest and digging the rubber toe of his shoe into the tile. "Lounds was my lab partner in bio, tried to botch our ligament reconstruction because of the whole Johns-Hopkins thing."

"What thing?"

"Dr. Crawford pulled me from class, maybe two months ago to take me to his office. He told me the Johns-Hopkins recruiter was interested in me for god knows what reason—" Will knew *exactly* why they were interested, but chooses to keep it to himself, "She followed us there and listened, so she's pissed because she wanted that spot. It's not a big deal."

"So, Freddie Lounds, the one who couldn't physically make herself stop correcting our pharmaceutical rep wanted to do her residency at Johns-Hopkins?" Bev laughs incredulously, shaking her head. "If she gets it over you, I'm staging a military coup."

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Secretly, Will wants her to have it over him. Dr. Chilton is the manager for Johns-Hopkins, the same man from the conference. He cornered Will about an hour in, needling him

incessantly about his dissertation. He, being a psychiatrist by trade, insisted that the topic of his paper, empathy and misunderstandings of Asperger's, had something to do about the author's mental stability. Dr. Chilton was quite persistent, asking Will to summarize his psyche and give him intimate details about his demeanor. The doctor was obsessed by Will's interest in Asperger's to begin with and the fact that eye contact made him uncomfortable didn't help. He kept tilting his head, redirecting his focus to attempt to capture his anxious gaze; and when all attempts had remained fruitless, he tried to startle him into looking at him. He asked about why he didn't have a dorm partner, if he was romantically involved, or why he wasn't. The ordeal became stifling and he was overwhelmed with relief when Bev motioned it was time to leave.

When the list finally makes its way to Dr. Crawford's window, Will wrestles with himself over when he should go investigate. Going in early means he'll find out sooner and get it out of the way, but everyone else would be there, too. If he decides to go after dinner, he'll be waiting all day and drive himself crazy...but he wouldn't know if he got Johns-Hopkins or not, and there would be no one else around. If he checks early and has his name printed with devastating permanency by Johns-Hopkins, he would have all day to sit and worry himself into a stupor for hours more than if he finds out later. Additionally, he would then have to start packing. Texting Bev would let him avoid all of the hassle, and he wouldn't have to face anyone else. He does just that when his clock strikes ten and he knows she's awake.

10:01

Could you check the list for me? Thanks

He chews his thumbnail until he tastes copper, anxiously awaiting her confirmation text.

10:04

im on my way to get u, we r going 2gether.

His panic spikes, gripping his throat with firm hands. He doesn't want to go, especially not with someone he knows.

10:05

bev :(

He tugs on sweatpants, knowing full well she'd knock at his door until he came out. He shrugs on an indigo zippered hoodie and picked up his thermos from the counter.

10:07

I'M OUTSIDE. U BETTER B UP OR IM COMING IN AFTER U

Opening the door feels like a mistake, like going down without a fight. He should have made her wait, just to see how long it would take before she snapped and kicked the door in (knowing Bev, it probably wouldn't take a long time).

“Bev, please you really don’t-”

“Nope, you’re already dressed. You knew just as much as I did that we are going down as a team.” She offers a smile he doesn’t return. “I’ll even hold your hand if you need me to.”

He makes a face, pushing his glasses on and shutting the door behind him. They walk down the steps together, their shared steps echoing in the tunneled staircase.

“You never told me where you wanted to go,” Will says after they hit the grassy plane separating them from the offices.

“I don’t really care, actually,” she laughs. “I’d like for it to be near San Francisco, I miss my parents.” She shoves her hands in her pockets, nudging him with her elbow. “Must be nice going to school in Louisiana, in-state tuition is, what, half of what it is for outsiders? Besides, you can visit your family whenever you want.” It’s Will’s turn to laugh, bitter as it is.

“Sure,” he replies.

“What, you never see them or something?” Will takes a deep breath before answering, a steadying gesture proving empty.

“Bev, I haven’t seen my family as a family since I was eight, and the last time I talked to my father I was in high school.” He wants Beverly to leave it alone, to let it go and just walk, but she doesn’t.

“Will, I had no idea, you seem so...” she shakes her head dumbly, her mouth opening and closing like she thinks she’ll catch the right words if she waits long enough.

“Stable?”

“Yeah,” she says, still shaking her head. “And I thought Lounds had it bad because her parents flew out to Cabo with her dog without her.”

Oh no. Oh *no*. God, *Jesus*, no. This can’t be happening. This, is...this is bad. This is horrible, this is the worst thing that’s ever happened to him.

His name, his godforsaken name, is printed in all-caps next to that trap, that *cage* of a hospital. He can’t breathe, he’s stopped breathing, he thinks. He stands, shocked, eyes glassy and rapidly reddening as he denies himself air.

“Will?” Bev asks, hand tightening around his elbow. “Will, this is a good thing for you, that’s- that’s incredible!” She says, concern etched across her face. She glances around them to see if anyone is watching, perimeter checking the room. “Will.”

“I can’t do this,” he chokes on his words, chest contracting, twisting painfully as he stares. “Bev, I can’t breathe.”

"It's okay, I'm here," she wracks her brain for a moment, scrambling to remember the code they set up freshman year for anxiety attacks. He'd inform her he couldn't breathe, she'd say...she'd...ask? Oh, *oh*.

"Where are we, Will? Tell me where we are."

He works his jaw, swallowing thickly. His voice becomes hoarse and breathy, scraping hard against his throat.

"Office building D, office 109."

"What's your name?" She asks, eyes trained on his unblinking eyes.

"Will Graham." There's a painfully long pause between 'Will' and 'Graham', so she repeats the question, satisfied when it comes out much quicker.

"What time is it?"

"It is ten-eighteen in the morning, I am in Baton Rouge, my name is Will Graham." He finishes the grounding routine for her, finally offering her a tormented smile. She returns it, hoping it looks like she means it.

"What are you going to do without me?" She asks jokingly, elbowing him in the side.

"It seems I won't be on this horrid test of courage alone, Price got the pathology residency and Zeller is working in orthopedics." He points them out, their tiny names inscribed just below his own. "There will be two familiar faces, at least."

Bev stays with him into the evening, helping him pack up his boxes and furniture. She organizes them in a way so he can undo the bottom and flip his clothes into the drawer without having to refold them. It's certainly creative, but Will doubts her tight stacks will stay together in the U-Haul. Just before ten o'clock, his door rattles with the force of a quiet knock. He looks up sharply at Bev, who shrugs.

"I wasn't expecting anyone, were you?" He shakes his head, but goes to open it anyway. Price and Zeller are standing on the other side, faces shining with bright smiles. Jimmy is holding two bottles, one of whiskey and the other of wine.

"We brought celebratory drinks since we'll all be going together," Jimmy says. Brian holds up two beakers, a conical flask, and a 60-millimeter crucible.

"We already packed up our glasses, so I have these."

Will laughs, a bright, happy laugh that brings Bev right up behind him.

"You are too much, come in, join our packing party," she says, taking the bottles from Jimmy and whisking them away to the faux granite counter passing for a 'kitchen'. Will shuts the door behind them, telling them to sit anywhere they want to. Brian exiles Jimmy to the bean bag lying in the corner while he takes the desk chair.

“Wine or whiskey?” She asks as they settle somewhat hesitantly among the moving items. Brian clasps a roll of packing tape, twirling it absently.

The two men announce their desire for wine in unison, Will choosing to remain silent, trusting Bev to have his order memorized.

“So, Baltimore. Are you excited?” Jimmy asks, folding one leg over the other in an attempt to reclaim some dignity as he sinks into a bright blue bean bag.

“Um.” Will busies himself with rolling socks together, flopping down on the edge of his bed. “Sure, as excited as I can be.”

“I remember the conference from two months back, Dr. Chilton had been so expressive about his passion for the hospital, I knew I wanted to be right there for my residency. You know, they tend to hire those who work there during this period of training because it’s such an arduous task to train any newcomers.”

Bev comes back with two beakers filled halfway with red, passing each of the guests one of them. She returns with the conical flask filled slightly higher than socially acceptable, handing it to Will with a smile.

“That seems a bit presumptuous, don’t you think?” Will asks, taking a swallow from the glass.

“Not at all, their salaries are astronomical, it’s hard to believe anyone would want to leave.” Jimmy says, his zeal reflecting in his passion for the hospital. As the conversation spins animatedly until the wee hours of the morning, Will finds himself warming up to the idea with remarkable speed, the alcohol rendering him much more pleasant than before. He hears the two making their goodbyes, Bev following them out into the hall.

That night felt like it was at least a decade ago, although it had just been about twenty-four hours. Will woke up in a dorm in Baton Rouge and fell asleep on a bare mattress in Baltimore. Dr. Chilton asked that the two other men report to their positions at one the next afternoon, but Will was told to be in the lobby no later than seven o’clock. Faint sirens from the ambulance port reflect Will’s unwavering nervousness, his fingers subconsciously adjusting his blazer. His feet thud against the brick drop-off zone, echoing around his skull, the world slowing as he dips under the overhang. Fern leaves rustle in the wind, people talk as they stub out cigarette butts, a man crinkles the mylar balloon proclaiming him a new father; and the doors grind open for Will as he passes through them. Dr. Chilton looks up from the red-haired receptionist, his face twisting into a controlled smile as he recognizes him. He offers an outstretched hand and as Will takes it, he realizes he has no clue what the man is saying. His voice is electrostatic, slowly sharpening into coherence the more Will focuses.

“...it was absolutely incredible, I was fascinated from beginning to end.” Will forces a smile, brain spiraling as he frantically attempts to fill in the beginning he missed. Dr. Chilton regards him with an unidentifiable look, but the intent is clear. “Your dissertation, Dr.

Graham. Even Doctor Lecter was taken with it, couldn't put it down. He really fought for you at the end, but you probably knew that already."

"No, actually. Dr. Lecter?" He asks, feeling his tallies already piling up just as he stands there talking.

"Yes, he's going to be your supervisor." Dr. Chilton shakes his sleeve, glancing down at his watch. "Speaking of which, we should head over to his office. I'd love to give you a full tour today, but we have a group of high school students upstairs begging to see an ACL reconstruction." Will follows the doctor mindlessly, vision still sharpening as he calms.

"The emergency room here is a very exclusive place, why do you think Dr. Lecter picked you for it?"

"My dissertation, presumably, enabled me to stand out from others in the same pool. My grade point average hardly pushed me into the top percentages, I'm guessing Dr. Lecter is drawn to unorthodox methods, perhaps a collector?" Will adds sourly, clenching his fists to dig nails into the tender flesh of his palm. His brown leather shoes squeak against the tiles, the messenger bag gaining weight with every step he takes. Dr. Chilton is shorter than him, but Will finds himself scrambling after him, jogging as they cut sharp corners down into the offices.

"Impressive, I see your bachelor's degree was beneficial. Unconventional, but an asset it seems." Will doesn't get hung up on the comment, he knows that any other degree differing from pre-med is off the beaten path. Behavioral neuroscience was a personal choice, a form of self-protection. Will nearly runs right into the doctor, who had unexpectedly come to a complete halt at a heavy wooden door. Gold lettering on the glass panel spells out 'Hannibal Lecter, MD'. Dr. Chilton knocks, setting his hands firmly at his waist. Will closes his eyes, repeating his mantra as he feels his nerves tighten past the threshold of pain. *It is 7:05 in the morning. I am in Baltimore, Johns-Hopkins, office space 301. My name is Will Graham. It is 7:05 in the morning. I am in Baltimore, Johns-Hopkins, office space 301. My name is Will Graham. It is 7:05 in the morning. I am in Baltimore --*

His repetition cuts short as the door glides open. Will doesn't know what he was expecting, but a man soaked in old-world charm and eyes the color of wine was not it. Broad shoulders encased in a perfectly tailored suit jacket nearly fill the doorway. The man appraises Will with sharp eyes and Will's heart stutters as the ringing returns to his ears. He wants to leave, but his feet are rooted to the floor with forces beyond his control. He tightens his jaw, lifts his chin in a display of shaken defiance, to prove he is strong even as his breath fails him; even as he feels Dr. Chilton's brain whirring with ideas of analyzing his brain, to pick him *apart*, he is strong.

"Please, come in." Dr. Lecter says, face set in a soft, welcoming smile. Will, naturally, doesn't trust it. He steps in the office before Dr. Chilton can introduce him, eyes raking over the enormity of an office.

Will thought that offices were supposed to be bare, empty spaces only used for paperwork and meetings, but Dr. Lecter's defied both expectations. Firstly, it is a psychiatrist's office, whether Dr. Lecter is a therapist or not. Will has been in plenty of psychiatrist's offices and

this is a complete replica of all of them mashed into one. It's almost admirable, in a God-complex kind of way. Will's eyes drop.

Dr. Chilton clears his throat, gesturing from Will to the doctor.

"Dr. Lecter, this is Will Graham, your residency student--"

"What does this say?" Will asks, blinking to clear the haze from his eyes. Dr. Lecter's eyes are crinkled with a smile when Will repositions himself. The quick, clipping Russian rolls smoothly from his mouth with practiced ease.

"Draw not your bow until your arrow is fixed," he says. Will wants to snort, wants to abandon this realm of smothering class and return to his forty-by-forty dorm a time zone away; but he doesn't. Will grounds himself again, firmly planting his feet in his shoes and hands at his side.

"You two will get on swimmingly. Look, he's already taken a shine to you," Dr. Chilton says, clapping Dr. Lecter's shoulder. "I have to get going but, Will, I'm expecting an update from you by eight, or I'll assume he's eaten you alive," he laughs to himself before checking his watch, again, and making his excuses.

Once alone, Will finds himself relaxing tremendously. The absence of his own personal devil is calming. While he doesn't yet trust the doctor, he'd blindly follow him than be tethered to Chilton. His eyes flutter around the room again, checking for any outliers he had missed. Dr. Lecter stands confidently at the edge of his desk, hip resting against a smooth crest as he observes Will's exploratory habits.

"You may sit wherever you like," he offers. Will nods, pushing his frames back up the bridge of his nose. He circles back slowly, each footstep cracking over the tranquil silence. He doesn't sit, planting himself just out of the doctor's line of vision. "Is Baltimore to your liking?" He asks after minutes of silent watching, resting the palm of his hand on the desk's lip.

"Um," he answers, drawing out the vowel longer than strictly necessary, but habitual as his focus shifts from book spines to conversation. "It's...pleasant enough," he replies.

"It is a monumental task to begin one's residency as soon as you are, it reveals a great deal about your character," Dr. Lecter says, willingly talking at the plant he can see.

"Zeller and Price are starting this afternoon, I wouldn't count myself as an exemplary student," Will retorts, irritation hedging his thoughts.

"I confess I have no awareness of any other residencies, I focused wholeheartedly on the search for my own."

"Why is that, by the way? Why me? You could've had Katz, or Neil Gregson, or the girl from California who redesigned prosthetics for her final exam, they do exactly what I do." Will leaves off the 'but better', even though he knows Dr. Lecter has finished it for him.

“You have imagination,” he says. “The other candidates are medical students completely, they are dogged in their pursuit of knowledge, but that knowledge has already been uncovered. They practice medicine for the sake of medicine, to discover the already rediscovered. There is no creativity in the utterly banal.” He pauses. *Utterly banal*, Will repeats, smiling disappointedly to himself. Dr. Lecter knows, but more than that, knows that Will understands that he knows.

“I acknowledge that I did pause over a few applicants, each of them could be considered your superior to those with no knowledge on the subject of emergency medicine. Your brain makes unimaginable leaps you yourself don’t understand, it must be a wearying existence to have so much intuition and no one to understand,” Will’s stomach drops, chest crushing in on itself as the words settle over him. He steps in time with his rapid heartbeat, coming up to stand behind the doctor still facing away from him.

“Do you understand, Doctor Lecter?” He asks, suddenly empowered with the urge to *strangle* the poise out of him, his fingers even twitching with anticipation.

“It entirely depends on your personal definition of understanding, Will. Empathy is a powerful gift, your grasp of understanding is leagues ahead of my own.” He replies, gesturing to the chair slightly angled toward his desk. “Sit, we have much to discuss.” Will gives in defeat, folding the strap of his bag as he tucks it against his chest.

“Your rotations will be supervised by myself and occasionally by Dr. Bloom. There are five other ER surgeons with other teams of residency students. I admit I have not had the luxury of a residency student in many years, so we are together in our journey of mastery.” The ghost of a smile returns and Will pointedly stares at the proverb engraved in wood. “Although you are my only resident, we will be conforming to the rigorous schedule of our peers: seventy-two hours without pause, we will be tending to the ER. Find breaks where you can, sleep whenever possible. There is a fridge hidden in this office, if you find it you may use it,” Will imagines that there’s a book in the room he’ll have to tilt and one of the walls will spin out to reveal a walk-in freezer or something, “...all I ask is that you label your items.”

The statement catches Will off guard, startling a laugh out of him, and once he starts laughing, he can’t *stop* laughing. Dr. Lecter either doesn’t care, or he finds it interesting, a facet he’ll report to Chilton when Will isn’t looking.

“Do me a favor,” Will says, rubbing at the corner of his eye. “Don’t tell Dr. Chilton about this.”

Dr. Lecter pauses, shocked for the first time since Will entered his office. Will thinks he perhaps already has, that he’s being monitored, when the doctor breathes out an answering chuckle.

“I am not relaying any of our interactions to Chilton, Will. I value honesty and respect over anything else, telling Chilton about what we talk about would violate both fronts.”

“Don’t honesty and respect kind of...clash?” He asks, looking up to the space hovering just over Dr. Lecter’s shoulder, grinding his thumb and forefinger together.

“By what do you mean?”

“You know... ‘Do you like my outfit, be honest!’ ‘Oh, honestly I hate it,’” Will mimics, voice shifting up in tone. “See? They hate the outfit, but telling the other person that is disrespectful, even if it’s honest.”

Dr. Lecter smiles, a small victory in a war with indeterminable odds. He is victorious in the same way Will is conquered.

The halls of the hospital don’t wane in complexity. Opposed to Dr. Chilton, Dr. Lecter isn’t going at the speed of light around corners and staircases. He walks at a brisk pace, but keeps his body half-turned to Will as he fills him in on the systems in place.

“Here,” he says, stopping at a whiteboard, “is where you log every patient you’ve taken care of in the last hour. Write your last name, their last name, condition, room number, and your intended treatment. You may operate autonomously, I trust in your capabilities as a doctor.” He motions for Will to follow, not giving him any time to process the information.

“You said you’d monitor?” He says, but it sounds more like a question.

“Yes, and I will. I am your safety net for the time you are here, think of me like—” he pauses, pushing through a set of double-doors, “...like a paddle. If you should find yourself in a position wherein I am preoccupied with another patient, yet you are fully capable of treating both cases, you may tend to the other patient.”

“A paddle?”

“Yes, Will. I will watch your operations, assist if they begin to go awry. I’ll not let you flounder as I did,” he says with a smile. “Down these halls are the ORs, you won’t be here for very long.” Will barely gets a glimpse before they’re off again, this time to the actual ER. “The ER here is comprised of four floors, all open-floors, meaning there are only curtain dividers, no walls. The nurses’ station is located at the front, by elevator B.” He points to Will’s right, the blue letter B illuminated by the elevator doors. “Patients enter here through the ambulance entrance or through that elevator, nowhere else. You’ll report to my office at five o’clock tomorrow morning for your first three-day shift, understand?” Will nods.

Until one o’clock, Dr. Lecter shows him around the rest of the hospital (which spans over several buildings): MRIs, the settings for the fMRIs, endocrinology, maternity ward, nursery, orthopedics, pathology, pediatrics, psychiatry offices and the psych ward, oncology, the ‘lab’, the blood bank, the pharmacy stations, physical therapy, genetics, all of it. Will is trying hard not to sweat, his limbs protesting terribly to the abrupt increase in activity. He gasps tiny gulps of air, clasp the metal armrests.

“So,” he pants, collapsing in the chair from earlier. “Big place.”

“It is,” he replies, picking up a frosted vase of water that had materialized in their absence. He pours two glasses, handing one to Will. “Questions?”

He forces himself to drink slowly.

“Just one.”

Dr. Lecter inspects him with soft eyes.

“Is the fridge in the couch?”

Dr. Lecter laughs softly into his glass.

“No, it is not.” He answers.

They sit in comfortable silence, each of them engrossed in their own thoughts.

“I don’t know if I’m what you need here.” Will says softly, eyes still downcast as he rolls the glass edge in his palm.

“Have you heard of the Brazilian saying: ‘at home saints perform no miracles’?”

Will shakes his head.

“Will,” he begins, settling into the seat opposite him. “No one believes they are capable until they prove to themselves their hands can do the work they once feared. You are not immune to the same paradox, but leaving is abandoning the work only you can do. Finding one’s perfect niche involves leaving the one they find most comfortable. Could you imagine the saints we’d have if all of them had the courage to pursue their goal?”

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“How was your first day?” Jimmy asks. The three of them decided to meet for dinner at the bistro a block from the hospital.

“It was...” Will tips his head, folding his hands in his lap. “Interesting?”

“Who’s your supervisor?” Brian pauses long enough in his devouring of his sandwich to ask. “I got Hardwick.”

“Park,” Jimmy adds dejectedly. “I wanted Dr. Sinclair.”

“I...uh,” Will says, taking a drink from his water. “Dr. Lecter is my supervisor.” Both guys halt in their eating, spinach hanging comically from Brian’s mouth.

“Dr. Lecter?” They breathe in unison, astonishment written clearly over their faces.

“*The* Dr. Lecter, as in *Social Exclusion* Dr. Lecter?” Jimmy asks disbelievingly. “You’re kidding! What’s he like?”

“He’s something,” he answers, spooning shreds of white cheese into his orange soup. “His office looks like it was designed by Stephen King and I’m pretty sure his scrubs are designer.”

“Well, do you like him?” He asked, excitement and awe radiating off his small person. Will suddenly felt like he was twelve again and his friends were badgering him about his crush. He stamps down the heat rising in his cheeks, the heat he will deny should the topic arise. He thinks for a horrifying moment he might be smiling and makes sure it isn’t *too* bright.

“Yeah? I mean – maybe? I don’t know, he’s nice...but he’s not smothering. He’s patient, but demanding. He’s expecting a lot from me and I have no idea if I’m even good enough for this.”

“Will, if you’re Dr. Lecter’s residency student, you’re most qualified. He doesn’t pick residents very often, how many has he had?” Jimmy asks Brian, looking horrified as Brian stuffs the sandwich in his mouth to one side to mumble something unintelligible.

“Three?”

Brian shakes his head.

“Okay, blink twice when I say the right number. One, two, three...”

Will laughs, holding the spoon in his mouth. His day was incredibly hectic and his hopes for getting up at four dwindle as he watches the clock creep toward the nine o’clock mark.

“Was that a blink for yes or are you choking? Yes? Okay. Four. *Four* residency students in, what, eleven years? Will, you’re one of *four students ever* to be his resident.” Jimmy cries, his smile bordering on manic. He laughed with them in their excitement, but eventually made his excuses to walk back home in the dark.

desiderans

Chapter Summary

desiderans (v) latin: to long for, longing

tw: mentions of sexual assault

It's five-thirty in the morning and Will is wrist-deep in a drunk woman's leg. His fingers move deftly over the open wound, suturing It's five-thirty in the morning and Will is wrist-deep in a drunk woman's leg. His fingers move deftly over the open wound, suturing it shut with remarkably steady hands. He bites his lip to keep it from trembling and ties the tiny black cords doubly so, securing them more tightly. He feels Dr. Lecter's keen eyes on him all the while. Somewhere, Will notices it and knows it should be unnerving, but the calm settling over him is heavier than the prickling at his neck. He picks up a rectangle of gauze, peels off the paper backing and sticks it over the nicely cleaned laceration.

"You'll need to change the gauze three times a day, twice at night. If the pain gets too much, fill this prescription," he says, scribbling down a low-dose painkiller before ripping it from his pad and handing it to her.

"Will it scar?" She slurs, eyes squinting in the glare of the hospital lighting.

"All wounds of this caliber leave a scar, it's just a matter of how big it will be. I'll get someone to call your boyfriend to come and pick you up, alright?" Will leaves as she nods, quietly asking a nurse to phone the number on file. He keeps his eyes downcast, eyeing his shoes as he maneuvers his way around. His feet move in time with the will of his subconscious and he finds himself drawn like endangered sailors to a lighthouse to Dr. Lecter. The space between his ribs, just behind his lungs roars to life with pain, a crushing, gnawing pain that grips his heart and tears into his diaphragm. It takes his breath away. He raises his cold, trembling thumb to stroke over the tiny ribs of his trachea, counting them as breath eases back. The anxiety cripples him more often than not, an ever-present reminder of his all too paralyzing shortcomings. Dr. Lecter doesn't seem to notice or care, Will imagines he'll only reconsider his choice if he makes a mistake and kills someone. There's a bubble of calm surrounding him and Will tells himself that is what keeps him so close to his side. He feels the warmth roll off his body, coating him in a heated flush. There's a scramble by the elevator, a man entering the ER with four long needles protruding from his side. He makes his way over to Will, sitting himself down with remarkable poise on a hospital bed. Without thinking, Will is prodding the man's side, Will takes the sutures in hand, swabbing on yellow numbing agents as he assesses just how deep the wound goes.

"And how did this happen?" He asks, securing the hook end into the moistened flesh.

"I was at my nan's and her sewing machine just...kind of...exploded?" He says, squinting up at the ceiling like he has difficulty remembering the incident that could have very well punctured an organ. "You have a nice touch," he continues. Babbling through the pain is something Will has become really familiar with, but he is stunned all the same by his patient's particular train of thought. "You have a very sweet face."

"Uh," Will can only answer with that right away, given how divided his attention is. In one hand, he has the key to this man's survival, in the other this man's budding attraction, and if Will had a third hand, it'd be holding his own distress. "Thank you?" He clears his throat, attempting to redirect his focus as he ties the sutures closed. "I'm not sure you should be thinking about that when I'm trying to keep you from bleeding out on the table."

The man laughs, closing his eyes with the force of it.

"Yeah, but your friend over there didn't give me any drugs for this and your pretty face is the only thing keeping me sort of—" his voice breaks, twisting into a pained groan, "conscious." He gasps short little huffs and Will's imaginary third hand drops the ball. He looks anxiously between the man and Dr. Lecter, who seems to have other things on his mind.

"Oh, oh God, I'm sorry, I...um...okay, look, I have to take you back for some tests," he stops short as the man strips his shirt to reveal a...sculpted chest, his sweaty, bloody face contorted with effort and focus as he listens to Will intently. "I'd like to know you're not internally hemorrhaging, alright?"

"Will it involve any pain medication? Hydrocodone? Morphine?" He looks over both shoulders before leaning close, voice barely above a whisper and a hand cupped in front of his lips. "Heroin?"

"Um," Will laughs a breathy, shaking laugh. "Uh, no. Sorry, I'll see what I can do, but it's just a CT scan. It'll be done within the hour." Will replies, paging the typical Radiology code for a heads-up.

"Will you be going down with me?" The man asks as a couple of nurses begin to roll him toward the elevator.

"No, I don't do anything outside the ER," his disappointment is palpable. "...but Carla will take good care of you. I'll meet back with you once I have your test results, okay?"

"I'm looking forward to it," he says with a tired wink and smile. Normally, advances as such are unwelcome and bothersome things, clinging wet and itching like seaweed. These are not like the others, startling Will with how pleasantly they settle in him. It wasn't raunchy or derogatory, they were polite and funny. Who else would respond to stitches with that kind of charisma? The corners of his mouth tug upward, his cheeks heating with adolescent infatuation. The conversation doesn't relax him enough, because Will starts at the gentle touch at his elbow.

"There's an emergency in the OR, we've both been paged," Dr. Lecter informs him, guiding him toward the elevator opposite the one the other man had disappeared into. Will can't tell if he's imagining the distant anger fizzling between them or not, but the twist of longing that

stabs up through his ribs is unmistakable. He flushes a shade deeper, squeezing his elbows tight to his sides. As the elevator slides up, Will desperately clings to steady breathing, but has no such luck. The elevator dings and the doors slide open and they both rush out into the hall, forcing their way to the bustling operating room.

“Man, mid-forties, his name is Brian Halloran. He’s a pedestrian that was struck by a motorist that swerved to avoid a cycling delivery boy. GCS of 3, pupils fixed and dilated. Atropine was given for a pulse in the 40s, BP is 184/110, pulse oxygen is 98 percent-” as the nurse named ‘Mia’ is rattling things off, Dr. Lecter has left Will scrambling to scrub in after him. “-chest x-rays shows a widened mediastinum and a head CT revealed a cerebral edema. He’s been administered 70 of mannitol, dexamethasone 10, and a gram of phenytoin.” She says, tying up the strings of Dr. Lecter’s scrubs, and instead of helping Will out, too, she simply casts him a dirty look. Will’s mouth hangs open, disappointment nursing in his spine as he clambers to tie himself up and get into the OR before Dr. Lecter notices his absence.

Brian lays ashen in the sheets, his eyes purple and sunken in their sockets. His breathing is done for him on the machine humming away at his side, the crash cart still unpacked and open for use. His heart monitor beeps in time with the machines and Dr. Lecter braces the man’s neck, turning his head to either side.

“Is he gorked?” Dr. Lecter asks. There’s a pause, Mia looking anxiously between the patient and the nurse to her right.

“It...he appears so.”

Dr. Lecter sighs angrily, ripping off his gloves and mask before untying his beige smock from his person. His nimble fingers do the same to Will’s, who catches it just as it begins to fall.

“Do an EEG,” he announces to no one in particular. “Run the standard confirmatory tests and if no change is detected in the next six hours, declare him.” He shows Will the door and the two exit into the hall. “That was, in layman’s terms, a waste of time.”

“It was fast,” Will breathes, head spinning.

“When a patient comes in gorked,” Hannibal is already filling him in, not giving him a moment to linger on the abruptness of the encounter, “Or, terminal to the extent of mechanical intervention, the doctors are responsible only for confirming the patient is, in fact, dead.” Dr. Lecter explains, eyes pointedly locked on Will’s, on the off chance he happens to be looking back.

“But what-” he clears his throat. “What if we miss something and kill him?”

“We won’t, that is why we do all of the confirmatory tests, to ensure the patient’s passing.” He folds his arms over his chest, leaning easily against the glass pane. “It is why ‘do no harm’ is in place. If a doctor should attempt to revive the patient, or keep them on life support longer than absolutely necessary, that is harm.” He says, motioning for Will to follow him.

“Right, but the man has a family, we just don’t know who they are. Who do we contact?”

“There is an entire department upstairs in charge of that very thing, you need not worry about it.” Their feet squeak in unison as they rush down the hall together. A light, feathery smell permeates the air, growing thicker as they tear through the hospital. He slows to a walk, taking a deep breath as he recognizes the smell. The whispering brown smell is something Dr. Lecter has already registered and ducks into an upcoming room. Will follows disbelievingly, snatching a cigarette from the hand of an elderly woman in a bathrobe

“No smoking in the hospital,” he says exasperatedly, extinguishing it in the sink before dropping it into the trash bin.

“Why not?” She asks, dropping her creped hands dotted with age down by her hips.

“You are in a hospital, that’s why you can’t smoke.” He retorts.

“Your point being?”

“Smoking will kill you,” he takes the box of cigarettes from her bedside, “as an intern,” he snags the lighter half-empty with fluid from her hand, “I have a legal responsibility to keep you from dying.” He explains sourly.

“Pancreatic cancer will kill me,” she says indignantly, throwing up her hands. “If a girl wants to speed up the process, where is the fault in that?”

“Wanting pain to end is perfectly human,” Will begins, somewhat baffled by the intensity of her determination. “But you are on the top of the list for a new pancreas, there is some hope in that, isn’t there?”

“No, there isn’t. I’ve been on the waiting list for, what, six months now Dr. Lecter?” She asks.

“Yes, six months now, Elle.” He offers a knowing smile which is returned with an exasperated sigh and a playful scoff.

“You act like you’ve never seen a suffering patient before. Is he new?” She asks, smoothing a hand over her puff of greying brown hair.

“He’s my residency student.”

Elle makes a pleased noise in the back of her throat, her wide blue eyes glistening in the sunlight.

“Lucky boy,” she says, raising her eyebrows with newfound cheer. Dr. Lecter collects her file, eyes grazing over the information once more with a quick ‘tut’.

“Elle, you need to watch your smoking habits. If you lose your health standing, the transplant will go to someone else.” He says, brows crinkling in dismayed concern. Elle waves a dismissive hand, turning her attention to the closed blinds.

“Oh, hush, my health standards fall right above ‘dead’. What kind of standing is that?”

“Quite right. Will?” He places the clipboard back down at the foot of her bed, motioning for Will to follow him back out into the hall. He worries his lip between his teeth, hugging his elbows back to his sides. Death hangs heavy around his shoulders, clouding around his throat and chest. In med school, he imagined dying in all kinds of ways: cancer, stabbing, aneurysm, drowning. He slipped into the mind of a patient with no hope of survival, how he would want to be treated if he were them. He imagined death so much that it felt more like a memory than an end to his story. But imagining and experiencing are completely different instances of the same event, and seeing takes hold and never releases its grasp. His heart sinks as he realizes his mistake: spending life tending to the dying is no different than dying himself. Before he himself passes, he will have experienced death more than anyone should have to. Empathy is a ball and chain, dragging him to the very limits of his own psyche. If he’s going to survive, he’s going to shatter himself beyond repair.

Will glances at his watch, realizing the passage of time has hurtled forward. It’s right at eight o’clock, a mere three hours since he had stitched up the woman with a BAC of .098. He stifles a yawn with the back of his hand, taking off his glasses to rub his eyes. Dr. Lecter chuckles to himself as he echoes his yawn.

“You have this much trouble your first day?” Will asks, ignoring his protesting muscles.

“Every successful surgeon does, if one is not struggling, one will not make a difference,” he replies.

As they round the corner, a nurse grabs hold of Dr. Lecter.

“You’re the attending, correct?”

“Yes, what is it?” He asks, swiftly changing their positions so they walk in step.

“It’s a rape case, you need to be there. She’s five-two, just under 110 pounds. She was found on her driveway by her neighbor, who called the paramedics. She has an abrasion in her lower back caused by a foreign object,” she points to the room overflowing with medical personnel. The two men scrub in together, tugging silicon gloves up to their elbows. They enter together, the nurse from before still filling them in on the patient’s status.

“GCS of 6, BP of 80-over-60, post-trauma status with signs of blunt force trauma to her head and neck.” Dr. Lecter nods, eyeing the prepared table of tools set up at elbow-level. Will stands opposite him, eyes locked on the newly forming incision opens. Blood bubbles up to the surface, beading along the cut. It coats the glistening edge of the scalpel in thick red film. Will swallows slowly in an attempt to stave off the rising panic he’s beginning to drown in. This is a girl, a daughter, a sister perhaps. She has a life, a life that will never be the same now that she’s been attacked in such a vicious manner. How could someone destroy the life of another human being because he can’t control his own desires?

It is the wrong question to ask himself. His breathing slows to almost nothing at all, the pendulum swings glowing behind his eyes. He is no longer in the OR, no longer an anxious residency student standing in the shadow of someone who might truly believe in him. He is a man, a ravenous, deceitful man. Rain smatters around him as he smashes a wooden rod into the tender flesh of her neck. Watery blood splatters over his face, diffusing into the raindrops.

Sickly sweet blood congeals on the concrete, perfuming the air with the heady scent of draining life.

“Will, I asked you something.”

The thoughts stick to him, latching on with permanent repercussions not yet realized.

“Sorry, what was it?” He asks, feeling his tally marks adding up from the only surgery he’s been a part of. With his luck, it’ll be his last.

“Keep an eye on the monitor, I believe we’ve found the source of this abduction.” He tilts his head, adjusts his wrist and pulls a quarter-sized mass from the opening. He holds it up to the light, turning the clamps in hand. His eyes come the closest to locking with Will’s for the first time since they met, the understanding mutual. He raises his brows, the silent question plainly asked.

“It’s,” he swallows. “It’s a finger. She bit off the tip of his finger.” His voice is low, barely above a whisper. The corners of his mouth twitch upward, satisfied by the girl’s ferocity. Dr. Lecter looks almost amused, the still waters rippling just for a second.

“What do we do with a finger?” He asks, caught between laughter and horror as he observes the soggy lump of flesh.

“Mark, you’ll take this down to Dr. Chilton, he’ll deliver it to the authorities.” Dr. Lecter drops the thing onto a padded tray that Mark holds out to him, who regards it with utmost disgust. “Well, that was moderately successful, I believe.” He says. Will knows under the mask he is smiling, whistling to himself as he sutures her back together. Will tends to her shredded fingers, swabbing them down and bandaging them. His eyes hang on her white hands, the bruises peaking up through the baggy hospital gown.

“Will,” he doesn’t look away from her hands. “Would you stitch up the lacerations to her neck?”

He nods, fingers operating of their own accord. They clean the wounds, stitch them up like he’s done a thousand times before that day. He clips the silk strands, swabs them with disinfectant and covers them with gauze. It’s enough for today, enough for a lifetime already. Will can’t do this, he just can’t.

He can’t sit idly by and watch people die from their own misfortunes. He tosses the sharps into the biohazard bin before shoving his way out of the airless room.

“I have no idea why I’m here.”

Dr. Lecter shuts the door behind him with a quiet squeak.

“It is not uncommon for a person in distress to return to the place in which they feel the most comfortable.” He says, settling down into his desk chair. Will’s eyes are ringed with red, lips puffy with tears. Dr. Lecter let him leave the OR, let him have space until he couldn’t bear it

anymore and wanted to know so desperately if Will had sought out his office as a haven. “I confess I do not understand what it was that hurt you so.”

“It’s,” he swallows, rubbing his palms together in smooth circles. “It’s the pain. I can’t take it Dr. Lecter.”

“Hannibal. You may call me Hannibal,” he says.

“Hannibal,” Will echoes, the name tasting strange on his tongue. “First name basis now, Dr. Lecter?”

“Only if it helps you to feel more relaxed with me.” He folds his hands, leaning over the table to be closer. “When I promised to help you, I was not lying to you. I will do anything in my power to help you survive here in this chaos. You’ve never been so bombarded with such intensity, it’s unfair to assume you have the functioning coping skills.” He says, watching Will’s pained expression twist into a polite smile.

“If I’m honest, I don’t think I have any coping skills at all.”

“Then I’ll help you find them.” He says. “In the meantime,” he says, “we should return to work. Lives need saving, Will.”

Back in the ER, Will is completely thrown by the appearance of the man from before. He stumbles onto the floor, collapsing onto the tile floors. Blood trickles from the corner of his mouth and Will curses his luck. He sprints to the elevators where his body has fallen and pushes up the hospital gown. His stitches burst, blood gushing from his wound.

“I need a gurney!” He calls to no one exactly, but the response is immediate. The nurses haul him up on the bed as Will holds the gash together. “I can’t keep him this way for long. Dr. Lecter!” He calls, voice hitching in desperation. He can’t do this without him, he can’t. His breathing becomes ragged, panic binding him in tight knots. Hannibal is at his side in an instant, hands working in tandem with Will’s to bind the wound as tightly as possible. An oxygen mask is attached over his mouth, a tube forcing air into his lungs.

The sutures are re-tied, the CT redone, the radiology nurse needed for any information. As the story pieces together, it becomes clear that Darren, the patient in question, convinced the radiology nurse that he was well enough to walk back to the ER. Somewhere along the way, he got lost and wandered around a hospital unsupervised for hours. Dr. Lecter spent the rest of his day in HR, negotiating terms with the legal team. Darren wasn’t pressing charges, but HR was still concerned with the prospect of having their near-perfect reputation soiled by a blood-dizzied patient gone rogue.

Later, as Dr. Lecter is checking over his file, Darren continues his mission of asking Will out.

“Oh, c’mon. You can’t tell me you’ve never been asked out before.” He says. Will keeps his head down, but the man keeps his eyes locked on his eyelids. Will tucks some hair behind his ear, clasping his clipboard tightly to his chest.

"I have been before, but none of them actually...I didn't take any of them seriously." Darren's face lights up.

"Does that mean you're taking me seriously?" He asks with a shy smile. Will flushes, biting his lip. Dr. Lecter pauses, the tension in the room palpable as the tension draws tight as a bow string. Will hesitates. He doesn't want this Darren character for the rest of his life. He wants someone sturdy, someone who can handle him at his worst, which is pretty bad. He needs someone with support, someone with strong hands and eyes the color of wine-

Oh no.

He can't want his supervisor, not like he should want Darren. He can't, it's wrong of him to even consider pursuing that relationship; to imagine how their life would be together, waking up in the morning side-by-side, bodies wrapped in mutual warmth-

No, no. He can't.

"I...I guess so," he murmurs, a melancholy blush creeping up his face. "I guess I am." Will knows he needs someone, why not Darren? He's strong, physically speaking. He spends weekends with his grandmother, he knows how to sew, apparently. He's so close to being perfect, it hurts.

"My number is on the file...if you want to go out to dinner on Saturday?"

"Yeah, sounds good," he says, feeling a lightness bloom in his chest. He hardly notices how fast Dr. Lecter covers the sheet of paper strapped to the file. The rest of his 72-hour shift passed in much of the same way, the same chaotic spree of healing and helping others. When he finally, finally, gets home, he crashes immediately on the sofa nearest to the door.

"Where's Dr. Lecter?" Will asks, approaching the attending standing by the nurses station. She smiles at him and offers him an outstretched hand.

"I'm Dr. Bloom," she says. "Dr. Lecter is up in New York for the next couple of days, I'm sure he told you about his split shifts." She brushes long dark hair over her shoulder, her white lab coat emblazoned with her name. *New York?* Alarms sound in his head, complete with flashing lights and sirens. For the thousandth time this week, Will's body strains to resist a panic attack. He wants to throttle Dr. Lecter for leaving him here by himself, for letting him drown without him. He chews his bottom lip until the bright, caustic taste of copper floods his mouth. He excuses himself, shoving his hands down in his pockets, all but running down to Dr. Lecter's office. To his surprise, it's open. He looks over each shoulder before ducking through the frame. A bright green sticky note - something Will didn't know Dr. Lecter would even purchase - peaks up over the lip of his gigantic desk. Will gets close enough to make out a telephone number and the words *Just in case, or for no reason at all*. He settles down in the leather seat again, pulls out his phone and puts in the digits, before typing up a quick message.

Paddle?

He pockets the phone and makes his way back to Dr. Bloom.

Hours later, he feels his phone vibrate against his thigh. He drops his cafeteria sandwich down into the plastic and answers it. His throat catches when he reads the name, scrambling to read it as quickly as his phone will let him.

I am sorry, I had an emergency in NYC.

Before Will can even respond, there's a new message.

How are you faring?

Will tells him he's fine.

I do wish to be back before tomorrow evening.

I have to go, I'll see you soon. I'll check in as often as I am able.

Will fights a smile. He throws away the rest of his lunch and returns to the ER, a newfound energy putting the bounce back in his step.

flacor

Chapter Summary

flacor (v) middle english: flickering, to flicker

Chapter Notes

two updates in less than a week? I'm on fire

I am loving all the sweet feedback and I'm so glad you're all liking this!

Anyway, I'm tagging this chapter for detailed descriptions of surgery (knowing this fandom it doesn't really matter but still).

Saturday night comes with surprising speed, but Dr. Lecter is held up in New York with some other yet unnamed emergency. Two days became three, then four, and then it was Wednesday and Will is drowning. He clocked in at four in the morning, two hours before he really needed to be there, but he couldn't sleep. Laying alone in the dark with his own thoughts is more dangerous than anything the ER could offer. Dr. Bloom, the cardiovascular specialist with which Dr. Lecter entrusts his shifts would be in charge.

Lucky for him, she was swamped with paperwork after a patient died in the OR by the hands of an intern who wasn't paying attention. He zoned out during open heart surgery, his hand slipped, and he punctured the woman's heart. In fear of losing his residency, he kept his mouth shut. Instead, he lost the patient and the board's willingness to process his license. He was removed from the program and notified he was rejected by the medical board in all areas of medicine. He couldn't practice psychiatry, geriatrics, oncology, nothing, not even genetics. Will swallows thickly as Olive, a nurse stationed behind the reception desk, fills him in. If he wasn't stressed before, he is now.

"Mistakes don't cost you your job," the woman tells him, swiping her spoon over the edge of her yogurt container. "Lying about it does."

"Yeah, you're right." He stands there for a minute, looking back at the ER. Instead of going back, he wants to go find a familiar face and try to relax.

"Take a break." Olive says. "You were already taking more shifts than one person should and now you're taking shifts that aren't even yours." She tosses the container into the recycling bin. "I'll cover you if anything happens." He thanks her, relieved as he heads for the stairs.

He follows the signs down to orthopedics, the building morphing into a much more open space. Every patient is accompanied by a physical therapist with muscle-building stations at random intervals. He maneuvers his way over to the desk, the receptionist there regarding him with an apathetic sigh.

“Is Brian Zeller on shift right now?” He asks. A deafening crash punctuates his sentence, followed by cheering.

“Does that answer your question?” She asks, not once looking up from the computer.

“Thanks.”

He pushes the doors open to the left of the desk and follows the cheering to a lab. A group of physicist interns surround a table in the middle, a sea of high-fiving and shoulder-clapping. Brian is standing on said desk, holding a fake leg over his head. The leg is cut just above the knee, a purple and black prosthetic attached.

“Will!” He laughs, hopping from the table. “Friends, this is Will. He’s an ER intern.” The introduction is met with a chorus of greetings.

“ER? That shit’s intense,” one of the women says. “Kudos to you for surviving.” She gives him a half nod as she works a wrench around a metal contraption.

She does not need to know that he really isn't, he just nods along.

“You guys do all the math down here, I’m just a set of hands.” He says with an anxious smile, crossing his arms over his stomach. The camaraderie is unnerving. Each of them know every name in the room, they have inside jokes and pictures of each other in their individual areas. He feels pressure well up behind his eyes, the pressure that builds in his throat is a familiar sensation. It is a mistake to be here, it’s wrong to leave the ER. He should seriously ask Dr. Lecter about Xanax or something, because at this rate, he’ll have a heart attack in about a week.

“So, you going to hang around with us today?” Brian asks, leaning back against the table. Will shakes his head.

“No, I,” he swallows thickly, shuffling awkwardly from one foot to the other and pointing a thumb over his shoulder. “I should really be going.”

The whole of the situation is an overwhelming reminder of everything he doesn’t have. He misses Bev. He misses Louisiana with its muggy bayou heat and the way he could stand in his dorm and hear the music from street festivals. It’s a real wonder his lungs still work after all the times they’ve decided to deflate on him, he notes as he slumps against the steps. Hugging his knees to his chest with enough force to crush his ribs, he ducks his head and squeezes his eyes closed. He should be looking forward to his night with Darren, but he isn’t. Throughout the week, he tried to coerce himself into wanting him. He tried to imagine what life would be like if he followed through; Christmases, meeting the family, explaining how he didn’t have one. It’s not a pleasant thought, having someone close enough to know exactly how to break him. He doesn’t need any help with shattering, he’s doing a pretty good job of

that himself. Dating leads to commitment, commitment to endurance. He isn't ready for any of what a relationship entails, not now, not ever. He knows he's not the dating type, he knows that about himself. Daydreaming about American suburbia or being a trophy boyfriend is one thing, but having it happen is another. What were they going to talk about, anyway? "How are your patients?" "Well, everyone is dying and there's only so much I can do, funny, right?"

He can't do this, but not like he can't do everything else. With surgery, he knows he has a safety net. Dating? Not so much. He can't force himself to sit down to dinner with a complete stranger, especially to a meal that would probably entail a mystery wine from a year he didn't care about and dessert with more syllables than ingredients. He pushes his glasses up, scrubbing open palms over his face. He takes a deep breath and holds it until his lungs burn.

He's going to go, and he's going to have a good time.

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"This morning, I'm going to give out your assigned posts," Dr. Bloom says, cradling a giant stack of manila folders to her chest. "Unlike the earlier parts of this week, today most of you are our lab work people. We didn't have enough hands to do all of it, so we'll be making some people very happy." She smiles, passing half of the stack to a nurse.

"Alicia, Patrick, and Melissa, you're on bloodwork," she says, passing three folders to the interns. "Oscar, Eric, and Ben, you're going to go to endocrinology and help man their lab." Folders are passed, people leave in and endless cycle until just four remain. "Piper and Rachel, you're doing the trauma pagers," Dr. Bloom tosses the girls the dreaded pagers no one else wants before fixing her attention on Will and the two people next to him. "You two are on results." She hands each of them file folders at least six inches in depth. The girl next to him nods, ponytail bobbing with her. "Go to the patient, tell them the results," she explains, attention snagged as her pager sounds. "Excuse me," she says, turning to read what it says. She turns back around in an instant, taking Will's file and handing it to the other girl. "Change of plans, Will, you're with me." She says. She takes off down the hall, her black pumps clicking down the hall and Will follows her despite the sinking in his chest.

"The appendectomy scheduled for this afternoon was moved up this morning, just now actually," she holds up her pager. "You're going to do the surgery, I'm going to help." Will's blood rushes, expanding to burst from his veins. He chokes, his throat contracting in on itself. His skin cools, hands trembling with enough vigor to worry him. He's going to nick a vessel, he's going to puncture something, he's going to lose his residency-

"I'm what?" He asks, voice breathless and weak with exhausted anxiety.

"I'll be there the entire time, I promise," she says, holding the door to the scrub room for him. Once inside, everything goes silent. It's like watching everything in slow motion; his hands bending the water under the faucet, the soap suds climbing up his elbows. He inserts his hands into the beige gloves, pulling them up to his elbows. A nurse ties the smock over his front, the mask over his mouth and the cap over his curls. His breath mingles with the clean smell of fresh medical paper, making him dizzy. He feels himself enter the OR, the patient already prepped on the metal table. Each step feels like a death sentence. His hands go numb as he finally reaches the table, eyes trained warily on the square of flesh exposed under the

blue sheet. He breathes, deep and shaking, the beeping from the monitor a metronome for his orchestrated efforts.

“Scalpel.” His voice is unsurprisingly quiet and the nurse asks him to repeat himself. He clears his throat and asks again.

The metal instrument feels heavy in his hands, the collecting weight of responsibility. He readjusts it so the point creates a pale divot in the skin. He gasps as he feels the taught flesh give, nausea rolling up his spine. He pulls the blade across, down diagonally where he knows the appendix to be. The subcutaneous layers become more recognizable the further he endeavors, a calm amid chaos.

“Forceps.” The metal bars dip and curve at the ends, a weight to hold the flesh apart as he works. The incision opens with reluctance and, as more tissue becomes exposed, the more Will wants to sink through the floor. “Scissors,” he says, taking the instrument from the nurse’s outstretched hand. The peritoneum is a casing, a translucent layer of tissue to hold the bowels together. He makes a tiny incision with the scissors, using the tweezers to maintain his grip on the light skin. He drops the tools onto a tray, hesitant for the next step. He inserts two fingers in the incision and slowly, slowly pulls the cecum out onto the patient’s stomach. The tubes of intestinal tissue band and curl in wildly complex paths, making it nearly impossible for Will to locate the ileocecal junction. Using the white band of tissue, finds the ilium. His trepidation is obvious as he uses his thumb to trace over the indicating lineage. He’s doing something wrong, something unorthodox he knows it. He feels the uncomfortable gaze of what seems like thousands of eyes. He located the lower base of the cecum, and with it, the base of the appendix. White, silky strands create a spider web over its entirety. Adhesions are a doctor’s worst nightmare; they’re difficult to cut, difficult to find, and even worse to remove. Using thumb and forefinger, he runs over the length of the appendix to its apex. Miniscule bumps under the surface cause more anxiety to crash up through him in dizzying waves. The appendix is congested. If the surgery had waited until the afternoon, the organ would have burst and the patient would have died. He’s distracted by the opaque, white bands of the tinea coli, clear indicators of the location of the appendix: once hidden by the same adhesions. With the appendix in hand, he returns the rest of the bowel to the peritoneal cavity.

“Forceps.” He holds the tissue open as he punctures the free border caught between two hemostats. Just under the tube of dense tissue, the avascular part of the mesoappendix, Will cuts. He needs to ligate the two ends. Between the shining metal of the tools, the pink mass is severed by the sharpest edge of the scalpel. The worst part is yet to come, he knows that. The mesenteric vessels must be tied carefully to avoid having the entire organ slip back into the peritoneal cavity. He uses the suture string to weave just under the part he’ll be removing. He carefully repeats the step, only stopping once he’s sure he’s found the base of the appendix. The appendicular vessel runs really very close to the cecal wall, and nicking that could mean internal hemorrhaging until the patient dies. He holds his breath as the scalpel slices through the organ, just above the hemostat. Will bites his lip hard enough to taste blood, heart stopping as the blade nears complete severance. The room is silent, the nurses and doctors observing him all hold their breath with him as he finally frees the appendicular pouch. Happy sighs of laughter float up from the nurse staff waiting on him.

“Purse string suture.” The opaque string is pierced through the tissue, at least one centimeter away from the end of the appendix. It curves up over the tinea coli, and with a twist of his thumb, Will collects all three in the suture. His brain spins haphazardly, spitting out useless information he has no need for – it’s an eighty linen on a round-bodied needle, the suture is white, I am going to faint –

He stabilizes the cecum, using the same Babcock’s forceps over the location of the anterior tinea coli. With a stout hemostat, the appendicular tissue is crushed at three points starting from the base. The hemostat is left clamping the appendix, he ties it shut with a 40 linen to close the lumen and the blood vessels he doesn’t care to name. Just as the tension begins to ease from him, the last possible bad thing happens. The surrounding tissue is inflamed and with one wrong tug, the line cuts into the unclamped vessel.

“Shit,” he breathes, clamping under the ruined flesh and tossing the sharp away with the other used tools. He rips into a new tray, hands shaking terribly. He moves a half centimeter under the tie and creates a new one, fingers tripping as they work to seal the cut. His breathing hitches once more, the scalpel finally cutting away the entire appendix. He drops the appendix, still attached to the hemostat, onto the blue padded tray. He drenches a swab with carbolic acid and dabs away the red fluid gathering in the center of the suture site. Will takes the hemostat, curls his wrist and inverts the stump into the cecum, tightening the suture in the other. He gently reinserts the organ into the peritoneal cavity. His hands work without hesitation, using the clear sutures for the subcutaneous tissue, then the black for the epithelial layers. He drops the sharps, letting the nurses crowd where he once stood. He lingers, body swaying in the doorway, panic and disgust filling like lead through his veins. He pushes the door open and takes off running.

He throws the gloves away, then the mask and cap. His smock is returned to a laundry bin, but his feet don’t stop sprinting until he’s released into fresh air. His body convulses, stomach clenching and he bends, breaks over a bush. Bile floods his mouth and he vomits. It doesn’t stop until he has nothing left and is dry heaving until his neck threatens to break.

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“How was work?” Darren asks as they walk shoulder-to-shoulder through the bustling streets of Baltimore. Will groans, throwing his head back.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” he mumbles, pressing his arms tight over his stomach. “It was,” he tightens his fingers into his ribs, “worse than usual.” Darren laughs, even though it wasn’t really funny and something snaps, bricks sliding together inside him. He knows the words Darren will say before they come out of his mouth.

“You want to come back to my place, let me make it up to you?” He asks. Will resists the urge to scoff, instead, he gives it some actual thought. Will isn’t one to put out on the first date, and most of the sex he’s had has been stressful, and he doesn’t even really want to. But something has made him less cautious, the desperation driven by the need for reassurance than true lust. He nods anyway.

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Will knocks at the still closed-door Dr. Bloom had showed him three days previous. It's a few moments before he hears rustling and even longer before the door opens.

"Will," she sounds pleased, like this was a much-needed break in the chaos in her office. "Is something wrong?" Will tilts his head, brows crinkling. "No, sorry, Hannibal told me you were a little," she takes a deep breath, waving her hand as she tries to find the right word. Several come to Will's mind, each one worse than the last. "-stressed, that's all. He told me to keep an eye out for you, just in case." There's a pause. She's not telling him everything and they both stand, the impasse stretching between them. "And, Dr. Chilton showed me the security tape of you throwing up yesterday. He wants me to do a psych eval." She confesses, all her words blending together. Will doesn't have time for this, he wants one day, just one day to pass without incident.

"I'm not going to," she quickly amends, eyes widening. "I told him it's perfectly natural. It was your first surgery by yourself."

"Right," he says, pushing his glasses back up the bridge of his nose. "I want to do sutures today, it's," he rolls his fingers, miming the steps taken to tie the simple knot. "repetitive."

"Of course," she nods, dipping back into her office to collect a clipboard to give him. "You'll need this. Happy stitching," she says with a smile. He nods, turning to leave.

"Will?" She asks, following him a couple steps down the hall. "Are you alright?" He represses the urge to roll his eyes and, instead, gives her a smile and nod.

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A full day of suturing is exactly what he needed. The motions of stitching sooth him into the rhythm of monotony. He did think about Darren and how he'd been so unforgivably stupid with the whole thing. Once inside, they kissed, it started to progress when Will realized his house was full of boxes. Darren confessed he was moving and he only asked him out because he wouldn't be here for long term, it was in-between as his grandma got sick. Will understood, was relieved, even. He left, clothes intact and the only change was the hickey peeking out from under his scrub collar. But no one was dying here, no one was bleeding out or suffering too badly. Six hours went by fast, he skipped lunch (again) and used his break to catch up on Cheers in an empty service room. It is turning out to be a good day.

"Okay, what happened?" Will asks, pulling on a set of rubber gloves. The blonde woman sat on the table looks panicked, opens her mouth, and words spill out. The problem isn't the talking, it's the fact they aren't English. He freezes, blinking a few times to make sure he wasn't having a stroke.

"Do you speak English?" He asks. She shakes her head from side to side, repeating the same foreign words. He looks around self-consciously, heat rising in his cheeks. He doesn't even know what language it is to ask someone if they speak it. An answering voice comes up behind him, catching the woman's attention. Will does a double take, dropping the box of gauze. Dr. Lecter stands next to him, hair mussed from the wind. Shame, for whatever reason, uncoils in his abdomen. They converse easily. Will shouldn't be surprised the doctor is multilingual, the surprise is from something else entirely. The way Dr. Lecter's mouth

forms the syllables soothes him, the rolling vowels in the unfamiliar tongue. Tension melts slowly from his body, his breath turning deep and even. Dr. Lecter gives him a warm side glance, a smile tugging at his lips. He wants so badly to reach out and touch him, feel the solid reassurance.

Dr. Lecter notices the purple suction lined with teeth right over Will's left collarbone. Warm, slippery jealousy springs to life with renewed vigor and suffocating strength. He wants nothing more than to cover the mark with one of his own: darker, harsher to smother the life out of whatever is brewing. He doesn't stamp out the urge, but lets it smolder with glowing embers as he formulates.

aequilibrium

Chapter Summary

aequilibrium (n) latin: a constant state of electrical homeostasis

June comes with sweltering heat, a dry ever-present haze of muggy warmth. Will's air conditioner system broke just as the heat set in with murderous force, the landlord slow to repair it. He sat out under the glare of afternoon sun for hours, working until his fingers blistered from the metal and the machine clicked back to life. Cheering floated down from open apartment windows as the AC began its ascent. His apartment finally looked livable as he set out to unpack each and every box he brought with him. The mantle filled with school pictures, his Behavioral Neuroscience diploma hung above them. He pasted pictures of past pets to solid paper and slid them into thick plastic covers in a binder. With everything he gained with his move, he lost more than he'd realized. For the first time, he sat and listened to the silence of his place. The unfamiliar ambiance set his nerves on edge. Sure, he lived alone in the dorms, but the noise of other people constantly pounded through his thin walls. Orleans Street here didn't have any festivals and the only novelty sounds were the screeching of sirens leaving Johns-Hopkins. He tucks his knees up to his chest, his socked toes pressed against the window pane.

From the window view, Will can see everything. The streetlamps cast glowing circles on pavement, cars slide through stoplights. People walk hand-in-hand down sidewalks, dipping into shops and restaurants. He sighs into his tea, bringing the mug up to his lips. As much as Will finds solace in isolation, he doesn't much care for being lonely. His eyes sweep over the monotonous pattern of the city streets, searching without cognizance for some sign of someone as alone as he felt. A dark mass shuffles slowly over sidewalk lines, head down to sniff invisible traces on the muggy ground. It looks like a German shepherd, the auburn hair disappearing into black. Will sits up, letting his feet hit the floor. He checks to make sure no one is walking the animal on a leash he didn't notice; but once he realizes there isn't one, he's on his feet and making his way out to the road.

He settles on the brick steps in front of his apartment building just as the dog is ambling past. He tentatively reaches out a hand, watching the animal carefully.

"Hey little guy," he says, turning his wrist to present his open palm. The dog noses closer, moist nose bumping over the pads of his fingers. He cautiously extends the other hand, intending to pet the dog, but the creature is one step ahead and scrambles back a few paces.

"If you wait right here, I'll bring you food, okay?" He asks. The dog blinks at him, long and slow. Will takes the steps two at a time back to his place, grabbing the deli sandwich he knows to contain some kind of meat. He finds the dog sitting, staring expectantly up at him from the base of the brick steps. He rolls up the thin sheets of lunchmeat, handing the dog

one at a time. Each time, the roll only sits for a split second before the dog is on them. Once the meat is gone, the dog reaches her nose further up Will's arm than before.

"Yeah, you were hungry, huh?" He says, letting the dog sniff his hands. "Do you want to come inside?"

The dog tilts her head as Will's fingers massage over her forehead. Her tail wags languidly, her big eyes shining happily. Will doesn't care if the dog belongs to someone, or if anyone else is missing her. He needs this, he needs a constant thing. He needs just one thing to remain unchanged. He takes her up to his apartment without a second thought to anyone watching.

The dog smells like...dog. He doesn't have any food or dishes, but fills up a paper bowl with water as something to tide her over while he can go shopping. Will sinks into the couch, satisfaction blossoming in him as the dog hops up on the couch next to him, curls up, and dozes off.

He returns first thing in the morning, arms laden with heavy bags of supplies. His shift starts at three, giving him a few hours to show his new friend around. He starts with a bath, massaging shampoo in the thick fur. He dries her off, fills up a food bowl, and hangs the leash up by the door. The collar he got is yellow, a smooth, woven pattern of blue nestled in the threads. His fingers cramp up as he fights the little metal tag on the band. He got the tag engraved with the dog's name, his name, number, and address. He offers her a treat before strapping the loosened collar around her neck, the name Laika glinting under his kitchen lights.

By the time he's finished taking care of her and dressing himself up for work, he has about an hour before he absolutely needs to go in. Dr. Lecter has an afternoon meeting during the hour Will has to kill, and he knows exactly what he's going to do with it.

Will drops the package down on the desk, setting his hands on his hips in determination. He wants soup for lunch and the fridge is the only thing separating him from it. It's time to find it once and for all. The bookshelves, as dramatic and as Hannibal as that would be, are out of question. The bordering offices are too close anyway. Will imagines a desk drawer opening, but it is too...antique for that kind of fashioning. He circles the perimeter, arms folded over his stomach. Nothing is even remotely suggestive of a cooling appliance; no cords, no wiring. The only outlets he is aware of are in plain sight, something Dr. Lecter probably made sure to include. There are only a handful of spaces big enough for what he knows Dr. Lecter would purchase.

The table, the one under his giant painting, is the only thing neither of them have made any mention of. The design is simple enough: a deceptively small fixture with two doors set into the front. Instead of having four wooden legs, this table has two, thick blocks of what appear to be cupboards. Will looks over his shoulder, then at his watch. Determining that he has enough time to spare, he walks over to the table and tugs. The right door gives way easily, revealing a stack of manuscripts too delicate for shelving. He moves on to the neighboring one. If this one is empty, he has no clue where that fridge would be. The door gives way, a cold breeze flooding the air around his ankles. He deposits the crackers in the fridge, repositioning it so his message is clearly visible. He shuts it with a smile.

After clocking in, Will heads right back to the office he had just left. Dr. Lecter opens his door with a carefully crafted smile.

“Please, come in.” Will’s chin tucks to his chest subconsciously as he slowly steps over the threshold.

“How was New York?” He asks, hovering somewhat uncomfortably by the door. Will is close enough to smell the mint on the other’s breath, the clean fragrance of soap and aftershave twisting his stomach into nervous knots.

“Difficult to discern,” he answers, his voice low. The alluring temptation of bodily proximity nearly erases the unchanging fact they are miles apart in every other sense. Will swallows, holding his breath until Dr. Lecter cuts the tension by crossing the room to push a thick book back in its place. “I do confess it took longer than anticipated.”

“Yeah,” Will breathes. His face flushes with shame. He really isn’t that person, the one to keep men in circulation as the last grew bored with him. He’s afraid Dr. Lecter already perceives him as such and there would be nothing Will could do to change that if it were the case. Something drops heavy between his ribs, lead and iron and freezing him with vicious anxiety. The cord supporting his own metaphorical guillotine is weathering, strands snapping as preemptive anxieties grip him. “Dr. Chilton wants a psychoanalysis of me.” Once the first words tumble out of him, the rest follow in a rush, containing every piece of damnable evidence he has worked so hard to keep to himself. “And I don’t want him to do it, I don’t want anyone in my head but me and every time I try to fight him off, he only takes it as encouragement.” He grinds his teeth together, in part to keep himself from letting anything else out. As the fight leaves him, he collapses in his usual seat. He curls his hands into fists, digging his nails into his palms as hard as he can. Silence stretches between them, Dr. Lecter’s shoulders tensing. He shouldn’t have said anything, he should have kept it to himself, what was he thinking? Telling Dr. Lecter of all people, the one who could very well break him with that one break, was – is – a mistake. He should’ve talked to Dr. Bloom instead, he should have-

“I will ensure that does not happen, or that I do it myself.” He says, finally turning to face his intern. “How are you feeling?”

“Does that start now?” He asks, a small, bitter smile playing on his lips.

“No,” Dr. Lecter answers, amusement crinkling around his eyes. “I’m interested in a purely amicable sense.”

“Truthfully,” he begins, shifting restlessly. “I have no idea.”

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Hannibal has had the entire day to ruminate on the implications of what he saw marking Will’s skin.

“I’m assuming your,” he pauses, unsure of what to call the excursion, “evening went well,” he says, fingers grazing over the spines of unread books. The dull warmth he’d been simmering for the last day or so suddenly swells; especially as Will shifts in his seat, giving him a new look at his bruised remnant of a night spent in another’s bed. The urge returns and it would truly be so easy to sink his teeth into him, to devour him from the inside.

Will laughs, clear as a bell. The heat rears up even higher, searing through him in the same manner he wishes to consume Will; without mercy and forgiveness, and leave nothing behind for another. It is perplexing that Will should remain ignorant of his turmoil and Dr. Lecter wonders if he is truly unknowing, or has dutifully pulled the wool over his own eyes. Will sighs, breath shaking and trembling as he shakes his head.

“Uh, no. It went pretty badly,” he says, folding his fingers together. The awkward tension Will could almost taste disappears. Dr. Lecter raises an almost imperceptibly pleased brow, eyeing him over his shoulder. There is heat where coolness had been, his eyes almost appraising him: an evaluating inspection. ‘Looking’ is far too weak a word for just what Dr. Lecter is doing to him.

“How so?” The words are calculated, measured evenly, chosen for their explicit neutrality; offering a moment to elaborate or for him to shut the door on that line of questioning altogether. Will’s brows crinkle, concern drawing his features downward. His mind bends, teetering on the edge of a realization but of which one, he can’t tell. There is something, something is changing, growing as turbulent as the waves rendered in wood next to him. It’s a precipice, a fall he anticipates and dreads all the same. As the gravity shifts, he nearly tumbles over, but reels himself back from his dizzying edge at the last possible moment. Dr. Lecter’s eyes are full to the brim with hunger, an scorned god demanding a sacrifice full blood. Dominance tilts the scales between them, the tables roll to tilt the power toward Dr. Lecter. Will sees it as clearly as he sees the surrounding office.

“I was a quick fix,” he says, the unspoken revelation of what is to come captured in his voice. Confusion mingles with mesmerizing fear and he is surely going to lose whatever is growing. This moment where Will’s response can set him free or entrap him. As he measures, the possibilities of freedom dissipate as the longing he suppresses wins out. His tongue drags slow over his bottom lip, glossing it with amylase. “I wasn’t holding out too much hope for it.” Acceptance rolls with the tide behind Hannibal’s eyes, dousing the fire with assurance of possible reciprocation. And as quickly as the disaster between them came, demolished everything in its path, they are left behind. They stand in the wake of something dangerously alluring. Warmth fades into acquiescence, complacency instead of devastating action. Will jolts as his pager shatters the silence. Dr. Lecter’s eyes tear away from him, checking the code.

“Car accident,” he mumbles, pocketing the black device. “Coming?”

“The patient’s femur is shattered, but we have orthopedics sending us a team for that. We need someone to give her a tracheostomy,” the nurse says breathlessly, like he’s going to faint if one of the doctors didn’t intervene.

“Dr. Graham will scrub in,” Will’s head jerks up, his stomach clenching painfully. “I’ll observe.”

“Awesome,” the nurse sighs. Will crosses his arms, waiting for Dr. Lecter to laugh and say he’s kidding, but he doesn’t. He stops breathing, his ribs threatening to pull away from the cartilage lining if he dares make another sound. He wants to scream, to yell that Dr. Lecter is doing a very poor job of following through on the promise of a safety net. But he doesn’t. He scrubs his hands until they swell with red hash lines, the water blistering as he tries to distance the panic with pain. He bites his lip hard enough to taste blood and disappears into the OR.

The woman is covered in smears of blood. Her face is crossed with deep scrapes and cuts, lacerations crusted with broken glass. Her lips are busted, blood coagulating and sealing her lips together. Her fingers are bruised and dirty. Will feels the pendulum threatening to swing if he hovers for a second longer on her condition. This is a graver mistake than to have it happen all at once. Breaks into her accident insert themselves at random, slicing through his train of thought.

“Pass me the scalpel,” he says, taking the ugly object in his hand (glass shatters, pain throbbing through veins and--). He hesitates, pondering if it would do him more good to stab it in his own jugular than to do the surgery. Either way, the pain is equal. He rolls his lip between his teeth, reopening the wounds to ground himself. The stinging pain distracts the rising crests of panic. He uses his thumbs to locate the cricoid and thyroid cartilage, the vertebrae just under the seal of skin. He dips the pointed end of the scalpel between the larynx and trachea, pressing enough to cut through each epithelial layer (metal crunches in on itself, the oncoming vehicle breaking the windshield--).

“14-gauge cannula, syringe attachment.” He uses his thumb to guide the instrument forty degrees away from the skin before pushing the needle against the white ridges of the trachea. The needle refuses to enter, increasing the pressure could send the pointed end straight through to the other side (screaming as wheels turn aimlessly, rubber burning on wet cement--). He pushes just a little harder, but the uncertainty clouds his attempts and he pushes with everything he can. The satisfying snap of entry, the piercing of the cricothyroid membrane eases his breath again. He pulls tentatively on the plug, nearly crying with relief as it fills with air. He gently eases the cannula into place, holding the incision open long enough for him to acquire one with a cuff. The curved end has two translucent fins that will inflate with air to hold the attachment in place (rain muddles the scent of blood as sirens blare through her haze). He replaces the orange one with blue, eyes scanning over the entrance site for any breaks or leaks before reaching for the pump. It’s a blue, almost bag-like pump that pretty much does the pumping itself. He holds it in his palms, contracting his thumbs in regular intervals until he’s confident it is full.

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He catches Dr. Lecter before he leaves the observation deck.

“You said you’d help me.” He says his voice hitching with hysteria. “That,” he points back to the woman smeared with blood. “Is not helping.”

“Will, you underestimate yourself.” He says, eyes much softer than before. He sorely misjudged the fiery stare from before, only now understanding when compared to the eyes present. Even as he kept his eyes trained on his shoulder, Will felt the gentleness he was intended to receive. He worried over his bottom lip again, the copper taste diffusing at a much slower pace than before.

“During surgery, I was paged about a cardiac anomaly. The CTs are waiting for us in radiology.” Dr. Lecter motions for him to follow, and Will does.

White masses stand out from black sheets, the backlights illuminating the strange formations of the patient’s heart. In a normal patient, the last branch off of the left-sided aortic arch follows a regular path in a straight line. This particular arch does not. The line winds up behind the trachea and above the esophagus, then returns to its usual route. Will has never seen an aberrant right subclavian artery in person or in a textbook before. There was a brief description in one of his courses, but this is breathtaking. His eyes wander eagerly over the CT scan, noting every other strange mutation in the same patient. The chance that he could ever see one in general is extremely small, the rare case only happens about twice in a thousand people. Dr. Lecter slides a CT from the patient’s childhood up next to the first, a scan done for an unrelated issue.

“What do you see there?” He asks. Will laughs disbelievingly, covering his mouth.

“It’s present there, too!” He exclaims, excitement watering his eyes. “This is the first proven case of an aberrant right subclavian artery being congenital.”

“Right you are,” Dr. Lecter says approvingly. The two are alone for the first time since this morning, but Will doesn’t notice exactly. The glowing panels in the results room paint him a livid blue, catching brightly on his glasses. It’s enough for today. It’s enough to get him through today.

Will has a twenty minute break, just enough time to run home and feed Laika. He rubs her belly, scratches behind her ears, and has just enough time to dash back to the hospital. He pants through his nose as he clocks back in, sliding his card into the system before meeting his supervisor in the ER. He stops short, temporarily overwhelmed with what Dr. Lecter is doing. He has a knee up on the bottom of a hospital gurney and a leg draped over it. He has both hands wrapped tightly around the space above the knee. He pitches his weight forward and the sickening sound of bone against cartilage fills the space. Will watches the contraction of muscles under the fabric of his scrubs, his face tightening in concentration. He swallows thickly.

“Mia, take him for an X-ray, makes sure his femoral head is still intact. The marrow will have already started to deteriorate. If it has, get me.” Dr. Lecter says. He nods awkwardly at the man’s wife, who looks caught between admiration and horror. Will can’t say he blames her. He makes himself busy with files on the nurses’ desk, killing time as he waits. Dr. Lecter either doesn’t notice him, or doesn’t care that he’s there because he buries his nose in a manila folder just handed to him and leaves. Will doesn’t bother following, instead, he settles down to help reorganize folders.

About an hour later, Dr. Lecter returns to the same station, file tucked under his arm.

“Did Dr. Graham return from his break?” He asks the one nurse who he can see, who points to the floor.

“He’s filing.” She drawls, trying her best to look disinterested. Will waves from his seat on the tile, legs folded in front of him. He mumbles something to the nurse next to him, who deposits a file in a large plastic container.

“Femoral head reattachment,” he says, his disappointment obvious.

“It broke?” Will asks, looking up from his activity.

“I am afraid so,” he says. “After relocating the joint, the arc fractured. Orthopedics is already down in OR six, I am expected to do the exploratory surgery but you are welcome to attend.” Will passes his files to a third nurse as he stands. He stretches his arms over his head, the joints popping audibly.

“I’m on it,” he says, tagging along behind him.

The observation room is more like an MRI control room than a real deck. He sits in one of four chairs, one leg crossed as he forces himself to eat the Ziploc bag of Goldfish he snuck in his scrubs. He gently pushes his toe against the wall, twisting the rolling chair back and forth as he watches. It’s relaxing to be the one watching instead of participating. For once, he sits in the OR without feeling as if he were going to die. He could get a little used to this.

inlihtan

Chapter Summary

inlihtan (v) old english: to enlighten, the act of enlightenment

Chapter Notes

tw: discussions of stillbirth

Since the four-day excursion to New York about a month ago, Hannibal hasn't left Johns-Hopkins. Of course, Will is thrilled that he no longer has to share the doctor, but it does leave him slightly panicked that the next trip would entail a far longer absence. He works as if every moment spent with Dr. Lecter would be his last, and he drinks up the information with strangled ferocity. Each moment feels stolen, like someone will come looking for it once they notice and take it away from him the moment they can. It is exhausting to imagine how far he would go to protect what little he has and Dr. Lecter is proving to be no different. So, when Will finds them alone in his office once again, he hesitates to ask, but does nonetheless.

"Do you have a set schedule for New York, or is it an on-call basis?" He asks slowly, looking up from his phone. He sits cross-legged by an outlet, phone charging as he waits for his next shift to begin.

"I no longer have a schedule, Will." He answers, eyes locked on the book he cradles by his waist. "I forfeited my shift to be of more use here, for you."

Will feels his face flush, the heat pooling in his cheeks. Dr. Lecter left his shift in New York to be more committed to *his* interning? He bites over his lower lip, returning to his phone. The notion of someone giving up something so valuable for him is unfamiliar and does not entirely sit well with him.

"It hardly seems fair for me to leave you to find your own way in such an environment." He says, busying himself with watering his collection of plants. "I thoroughly disliked being left to rely on my own compass when I was never sure where the needle was pointing." Will can't imagine Dr. Lecter struggling with anything.

"And they just...let you?" He asks. No one in their right mind would just let a surgeon like Dr. Lecter walk out on that many shifts.

"Not entirely," he says. "but persuasion, it seems, is a lost art few master."

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Will opens a file folder, looking over information he has no use knowing. It's not his patient, the condition isn't life-threatening or urgent, nor is it interesting. He ducks his head further into the paperwork doubling as a cover for anyone who would want to talk to him. Another intern takes her place next to him, taking the stack of files by his elbow.

"You know," she says, Will sighing as he realizes his guise hadn't worked, "the word is, they used to be together." She looks pointedly at Dr. Lecter conversing with Dr. Bloom. "Like together, together." He follows her gaze unwittingly, sharp, cold, realization stabbing high in his chest. He sees it so clearly he must remind himself it isn't part of the present, but of the past Dr. Lecter kept carefully hidden. Will doesn't know if he is surprised. Of course, with his luck, he should be interested in someone completely out of reach. Will nods numbly, the girl skipping away to the lab with her files. Will is left alone with the overwhelming feeling of being tricked.

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Rain smatters over the roof of the hospital, streaking window panes and dousing Will's hopes of sitting outside for lunch. He'd take to sitting just under the oak tree, book in hand as he killed his thirty minutes of peace. Eating in the cafeteria is out of the question, especially with the astounding frequency with which relatives of patients seek out healthcare professionals to needle for information. Half of the time, they aren't even the of patients said professional. He doesn't have anywhere else to go, but he can't skip lunch again. If he doesn't eat, his hands will be shaking for an entirely different reason that's out of his control. He still needs to pick up his lunch bag from Dr. Lecter's office and, hopefully, he won't be in there to interrogate him. He'll end up with Olive, and that is definitely okay with him.

He retrieves his bag without an issue and is sitting behind Olive's desk on the floor in no time. He unwraps his granola bar and forces himself to eat it.

"Don't you know how to cook?" She asks, giving his box of snack foods an insulted side glare. Will shrugs.

"Not really," he says, zipping up the bag self-consciously. The last thing he needs is her finding out there's a Lunchable in there.

"You're gonna starve, eating like that." She says. "Also, you don't have to sit down there, there's a chair next to you."

"No, that's fine," he replies, pulling his knees closer to his chest. "I like where I am."

"Hiding?"

He shakes his head, though he knows he truly is. She raises an eyebrow.

"You found out about Dr. Lecter's love life?" She asks, looking at her paperwork like she hasn't just asked him that question. Will chokes, covering his mouth to keep from spraying the floor with puffed oats.

“What?” He asks, words distorted through his lunch.

“You heard me. And I don’t blame you,” she continued, ignoring Will’s look of horror. “It’s not a pleasant thought, those two, practically living together-”

Will cuts her off with a raised hand, squeezing his eyes shut.

“I don’t want to talk or hear about it.” He says, returning to his mostly prepackaged lunch. His stomach rolls, lurching with the thought of Dr. Lecter in an actual relationship. He was being cheated, conned into submission. Will doesn’t want to know why Hannibal would do that to him in particular, he doesn’t have any special assets Dr. Lecter would need to—

Dr. Chilton comes to mind almost immediately. Dr. Chilton would want Will to be in the palm of one of his doctors’ hands. The best thing to do for an uncooperative patient is to fenagle their trust by means of manipulation. In this scenario, Will is the uncooperative patient and Dr. Lecter the ambassador. The exchange in his office had to have been a grandiose display of power, the forecast of the year to come. He’s being ridiculous, Dr. Lecter wouldn’t do that to him, not after that morning.

No, if Dr. Lecter is willing to lie to his boss, he’s more inclined to do so to Will.

There are several courses of action Will can take. He could march himself right down to HR and demand relocation. That is, perhaps, the easiest method of dealing with the situation, but avoidance is submission. He will not be Dr. Chilton’s bitch for the rest of his residency and if he leaves, he certainly will be. He could ask a different resident to take him, but that would mean he would still have to deal with every problem he’s facing, but with much less leverage. No, he corrects himself. Running himself over in the parking lot is the easiest option, but he’d probably get proper healthcare in time and live, but be sentenced to an institution. That would still leave him as Chilton’s bitch and alive. He could prove he is their equal and not to be trifled with.

“While you’re here,” Olive says, pulling out a file with an orange tab. “Get these to Mrs. Hampson in room 327 and you’ll make her a very happy person.”

“Negative breast biopsy?” He asks, skimming over the insides of the file folder. “Thanks.” He scrambles to his feet, nudging his lunch bag under the counter.

“No need to thank me, sugar. You’re doing me a favor,” she says. As Will begins to round a corner she adds: “Rule is, if you leave it with me I can look through it.”

He nods absently, heading down to the indicated room.

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Will knocks hesitantly, file pressed tightly to his chest. He pauses, listening to the abrupt halt in voices. He pushes the meeting room door open, keeping his eyes trained on the floor as he smiles. The woman holds fast to her husband’s hand, their son drops his toy cars in attentive expectation.

“Hi, I’m,” he clears his throat, “Dr. Graham, I have your biopsy results.” He doesn’t need to open the file, but does anyway, second-guessing himself as he rereads her file. The word ‘negative’ is spelled plainly by the cancer box, like he thought.

“Well, what are they?” She asks impatiently, more irritated with his hesitation than the situation. “You’re not even my specialist, are you authorized to see that file, anyway?”

“I am, yes-”

“He’s an intern!” Her husband exclaims, pushing himself away from the table. “I saw him earlier, Christine, they sent us an intern to give us your results.”

“I am not your specialist,” Will says, holding up a panicked hand in surrender. “But I can read, this is just reading you your results. I had no part in it, you’re right, but I am helping.” His voice hitches, breaking over the last word. He hadn’t felt like he was helping since he got here, and, clearly, he still isn’t. The woman settles her husband and they murmur to one another. Will is overcome with the urge to throw the file on the table and leave, to let them just figure it out themselves.

“Your test was negative.” He states, very clearly, he might add.

“I’m not sick?” She asks, mouth falling open, tears swimming in her eyes.

“Not from this, at least.” He does his best to sound reassuring. “Which is a good thing.”

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The thing about the ER is that urgent situations just happen. He wasn’t gone more than ten minutes, but, apparently, that was enough for a patient to create chaos.

The man is big – tall, wide, and covered in hair – with his left pant leg torn to shreds and sticky with blood. His skin is torn and ripped from the bone in the unmistakable pattern of a dog attack. Dr. Lecter held down one leg and the security guard got the other. The nurses are only concerned with holding down one arm for the tranquilizer and the other arm slips free. Before Will knows what’s happening, the patient lurches forward, landing a blind shot at Dr. Lecter. Surprisingly, the nurses force the medication into his bloodstream and Dr. Lecter doesn’t even flinch. Will seems to be the only one that noticed because no one else moves to aid him. The flurry of medical personnel swarms the body, working restraints over his wrists and ankles to tether him down. Dr. Lecter steps back, turning on his heel to walk right by Will.

“Come,” he says, beckoning him with two fingers. Will, of course, obeys.

“Get the packs of peroxide,” he orders, gesturing to the box of peroxide pouches. “Gauze, sutures just in case,” Will does as he’s told, hands scrambling to collect everything.

“Numbing agent?” He asks, jerking his chin at the pump of slightly pink fluid. Will’s brain is moving much faster than he can truly comprehend as his hands grab everything in the

quantities he thinks are sufficient. Dr. Lecter shakes his head, an unexpected response and

Will has to stop himself from pumping the gauze squares thick with it.

He struggles to hold everything, but maintains his balance long enough to get back to Dr. Lecter's office.

"Pass me the mirror, Will." He says, attempting to put on rubber gloves. Only then does he realize what Dr. Lecter intends to do. Will forces himself to look the man in the face, assessing his injury. Initially, he didn't think the hit was that bad, but the blood gushing from his lip suggested otherwise. Drops of burgundy collect on his scrub top, a stark contrast to his mint colored uniform. Will shakes his head, dropping the items on the desk top.

"It would be safer if I do it," he says quietly. Dr. Lecter's hard eyes crinkle ever so slightly around the edges, disturbing the still pools Will imagines inhabit the doctor's mind. He pauses, not moving a single muscle in his body as he waits for the doctor's reply. A curt nod gives him the approval he needs and he sets to work cleaning up what he can.

Will hooks his foot around the leg of the chair, nudging it back a few inches so he can get between the doctor and his desk. He bends at the waist, fingers moving deftly over his bloodied lip. Peroxide washes over the laceration, bubbles of carbon and blood rising to the surface to expel infection. Will collects the fluid in a fresh cotton square, dumping the used ones in the bin.

Before this moment, Will has not been fewer than a foot away from Dr. Lecter. Now, he stands close enough to feel his breaths puffing evenly over his own jaw. Also before this exact moment, Will had never seen eyes the color of whatever color Dr. Lecter's were. Brown and scarlet, green with yellow all mingling together. Behind those eyes is still uncharted territory; a land without a map. Hannibal's mind is a landscape; rolling hills and ravenous waterfalls, forest with frequent fires and mountains capped with snow. Each one is presented knowingly, and Will wonders what he will see when Dr. Lecter allows him to observe the naturally occurring terrain. Will has never seen it before and probably never will. Facades are created for protection, and Dr. Lecter is a man with many facades. Will finds himself terrified of what horror lurks in those depths that made so many faces necessary.

He doesn't want to know, he's better not knowing. Ignorance is bliss. Even so, curiosity stirs with a force he is unable to stamp out with remote success.

The image of the doctor with Dr. Bloom flashes in his mind's eye, accompanying the tender feeling of slick anger.

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Dr. Lecter, again, disappears to HR for a twenty-minute meeting. During which, Olive hands him vials of blood to hand over to the lab specialists. He got to the lab just fine, but getting back to the ER is his current challenge. The sun had set, the sky turning violet. Purple light filtered in through windows, the lights turned low in the halls. He hums to himself, wringing his hands together as he walks. The signs stopped making sense and Will can't remember if Dr. Lecter had ever showed him this area of the hospital before. He decides that no, he has never seen this part before.

He squeaks around the corner, halting as quickly as his mind registers the scene before him. The wall is open, a thick glass window exposing rows of tiny cribs. Nurses in pastels care for the little babies, the only fluorescent light comes in from the ceiling tiles over the beds. A woman, exhausted folds over herself in a wheelchair. Her robe hangs over her thin body, draping in wide folds. Her thin hands loosely hang over the armrests, her husband stroking over her hair. Tears streak his face, glinting under the light. The crib they stare at is empty. A nurse comes by and erases the white board that had their last name written on it. The erasure invokes a fresh round of tears from the father, and as Will strains to breathe, the pendulum swings.

There is pain and panic as the baby is taken from her, the tiny thing can't breathe. Rather, it won't breathe. It's an excruciating tearing, shredding his insides in an elaborate pantomime. A stillbirth is a horrendous realization of nine months wasted. Cribs purchased, rooms painted, names picked for a child that will never live.

The pain is unbearable, making him stumble as he turns and leaves.

In his tearful rage, he finds his way back to Dr. Lecter's office. He abandons the horror of the day, the unsupported feeling of betrayal and enters without knocking. He shuts the door behind him with shaking hands. Dr. Lecter drops the book he was reading, pushing himself to his feet as he clambers over to him. Will clings to Dr. Lecter's scrubs, burying his face in his shoulder.

"What is wrong, Will?" He asks, smoothing firm hands over his back. It's a long while before Will can speak, his shaking voice abandoning him. He can't understand his own pain, the suffering that is not his own to handle. It is an inarticulate experience, something un conveyable by words. He hold on to the other man with so much force, as if pressing their bodies close enough Dr. Lecter would understand in the same way Will does. He presses his fingertips into his skin, the tears retreating behind his eyes as ferocious trembling takes its place.

"A stillbirth," he manages to gasp between dry sobs, his chest threatening to burst with unmanageable pain. Dr. Lecter doesn't understand, Will knows he doesn't. But he also doesn't ask any questions, either, and that is good enough.

"Where are we, Will?" He asks. Will nearly pushes the doctor away in surprise, questions that will remain unanswered. Did Bev tell him about it? Or did Bev tell Brian or Jimmy, who then told Dr. Lecter. Somehow, he finds himself not caring as he mumbles his answer. Dr. Lecter goes through his sacred routine with such a reverence that overcomes him. The pain of the parents in the nursery intermingles and tangles with his own newfound discomfort. Only when he realizes Dr. Lecter is doing this because he truly cares, does Will begin to cry.

The tears do not faze the doctor, if anything, they urge him to be more gentle. Words in a language Will doesn't recognize fall on uncomprehending ears. The syllables aren't the clipping Russian from before, or the rolling language from the woman in the ER. They are familiar, even more so than the English Will understands. His tears subside as he closes his eyes, relaxing as Dr. Lecter begins to sway. The comfort of a sturdy, warm body is a drink to a dying man. The contact is something Will hadn't even realized he was missing until now. In the stillness of the darkened office with Dr. Lecter still murmuring in the foreign language,

Will sighs. His face crinkles in concentration as a scene of a still lake edged with black trees and of turrets peaking flashes behind his eyes. It is another of Hannibal's exteriors, a somberly panorama from a land Will believes to be a true place. Like Will's aversion to intimate eye contact, Hannibal is most reluctant to show his deepened past. The scene he sees is not his true vista, but it is closer to the elusive place for which Will searches.

kumelich

Chapter Summary

kumelich (adj) old german: comely, becoming, pleasant to observe

Orleans Street looks just like every other street in the northeastern United States during fall. The cement of the road is a faded blue and cracked in odd places, not having been repaved in many years. Broad tree trunks turn dark with the downpour that had settled in three days ago, the leaves turning to burnt shades of orange. A blanket of fallen leaves covers everything; sidewalks, benches, cars. Gutters clogged, swollen from the sheer volume of them, even the man-made lake down the street lay hidden beneath a thick layer of brown and red. On their walks, Laika collects them in her mouth to drop in a pile at the foot of the corner lamppost. She charges through piles of them, getting pieces of them caught in her dew-moistened fur. The brick steps up to his apartment entrance has a clear path up the middle, but the edges and corners remain choked with them.

Inside his apartment, Will toes off his boots and hangs up his green jacket, the same one he bought as the first chill set in. He has the morning off again, something Dr. Lecter gave him so he could deal with his latest ‘assignment’. In addition to their newly shared lunches, Will met with the doctor once a week to discuss how he was feeling; a formality, of course, recommended by Dr. Chilton. In retaliation, Dr. Lecter would fax over a rubber-stamped statement ensuring Will’s positive improvement and mental stability. They, then, could return to their conversation unhindered by paperwork. Due to the enormous amount of stress Will communicated to Dr. Lecter during one of their meetings, the doctor suggested Will do some soul-searching.

“Why are you here?” he had asked. Will didn’t answer and knew he wasn’t meant to. He typed up the question posed in a Word document the night before. Will feeds Laika and sits at his computer, staring at the blinking cursor as he contemplates his response. Will has told no one of his past, not even Beverly who, with no competition, is by far his best friend. He’s struck with sudden understanding of Dr. Lecter’s many façades, he too has things he’d rather not come to light.

Will’s mother died when he was very small, but not too small to forget the pain of her absence. Sometimes, he dreams of a woman with long black hair, smiling over the collar of a windbreaker. He doesn’t remember the sound of her voice, but he knows it’s her he’s seeing. It was a car accident; the driver of the other vehicle was so intoxicated he couldn’t see her headlights in the rain. His SUV t-boned hers in the middle of a four-way intersection, pinning the red sedan to a light pole. The white hood of the drunk man’s car crunched in and shattered his windshield, but he got out with a scrape over his brow and a bruise from his steering

wheel. The EMTs said he was a miracle, but Will's father disagreed. He didn't blame the other man, he blamed himself. The only reason his mother was out that late was because the two had an argument and she left, claiming she needed fresh air.

When Will turned seventeen, his father drowned in a boating accident while he was at school. The paramedics promised him it was an accident, but Will knew better. Three weeks before his death, they were sitting down to leftovers when Will told him he wanted to go to medical school. His father was initially excited for him and said he'd check the balance of the college savings account his mother set aside. Will knew it to be empty, with his dad's newfound drinking habit and weekly excursions to the casino, but humored him along anyway. When his father found the account drained to a meager twenty cents, he promised he'd make it up to him some way or another, but he needed time. Will assured him it was fine, that he didn't have to go to school. He could work in the shipyard with him instead. His father wouldn't hear it. He told Will he had too much brains for that kind of work and, besides, it wouldn't support a wife and kids. Will told him he didn't want a wife or kids and that was the last straw. His father grew purple with anger, screaming at him that he should be ashamed for saying that, because he wouldn't know what he had until he lost it. Will let it go and applied for a position repairing motors for maintenance boats. Unbeknownst to Will, his father took out a life insurance policy the same afternoon worth well over ninety-thousand dollars, and Will named as the sole beneficiary. Will didn't put the two together until he received a call from their insurance company, asking when he was available to collect his money.

After the accident, he was sent to his grandparent's in Baton Rouge. The couple sat early in their sixties, a spry pair of community-focused individuals. The day he arrived was blistering, making him break into a heavy sweat as he moved his boxes from the back of a taxi. She met him on the porch with disdain, letting him do as he pleased if he accompanied them to church on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights. He didn't have much else to do that summer. He finished high school at the local public school down the road, enrolling two days prior to his senior year. His days began with a routine vomiting, a skipped breakfast, and an anxiety attack in the bathroom once he got there. He trembled for the duration of the day, only stopping when he curled up in bed to go to sleep. He made few friends in his stint; a set of fraternal twins, Michael and Alexa, and a handful of their theater buds. Will didn't want to be Will anymore. He stopped wearing his glasses, feigning stability for the sake of this new person he was pretending to be. The persona made him feel invincible, like he could do anything he wanted and get away with it. He was in a new town with new people, none of whom knew him to be the wilted orphan from Minnesota. As he gained popularity, he lost himself. He kissed the boy (he only refers to him as 'the boy' in his head. Calling him by his name only deepens the cut, reminding him of what he lost) over the console in his shiny red convertible after school. That became a habit, a gateway drug for physical affection. The kissing turned into more adventurous activities, and since he was mostly ignored in the house, the attention was dizzyingly addictive. He started sneaking him up to his room for late-night talks usually ending in sex. They would share his small twin bed, sleeping in sweaty sheets until Will's grandfather would come up the stairs to wake him for church. He hid the boy in his closet – the irony of such an action not lost on Will – and giggled as he helped him down the ivy ladders. This same boy encouraged him to enroll in medical school, telling him not to waste the money given to him by his father. They printed out the paperwork and split the stack, each of them tackling half of the forms.

The affair ended abruptly when his grandmother went out to water her gardenia patches and caught Will on the boy's lap in the car. She allowed him to stay until he graduated, but when the ceremony ended he was promptly kicked to the curb, Louisiana State acceptance letter in hand. He moved to the dorms and never saw the boy or his grandparents again.

Will doesn't write this, he knows better than to put any of this on paper, but the gist of the message is clear: he is here because he won't waste his life. He isn't going to let his father die for nothing, nor will he let the kindness of the boy go by the wayside. He is there because of the generosity of others and to return the favor any way he can.

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"Have you thought any more on the topic of our question?" Hannibal asks, setting two covered dishes out on the desk. Will thanks him as he takes one, digging in with fervency. Dr. Lecter is the best cook Will has ever met and every lunch, he finds himself drawn to the office with untamed curiosity and anticipation. He doesn't know the names of half of the things he's putting in his mouth, but they are delicious and he can confidently abandon his snack food reserves. He sits cross-legged in a leather chair, bowl balanced on the crossing of his shins. He hesitates a moment before answering.

"I'm here because..." a lump rises in his throat, the response caught in the crosshairs of his own doubt. "Because of the very unfortunate way my childhood turned out to be." The remainder of his answer, namely the rest of his unsent document sitting closed at home, takes up the rest of their lunch break. Even as he tries to keep it brief, the time slips away. Dr. Lecter never once nods or asks any questions, instead he listens without comment to the carefully worded response. After Will finishes, the doctor only has one thing to say:

"You are brave beyond your own perception."

Will lets the words sit, hang in the air as he breathes. He's never been called brave before and it doesn't make any sense. What he did, what he continues to do is not brave. It's what he is supposed to do, he doesn't have a choice. He never once gave a thought to doing something else besides following through on his goal. It's not bravery or confidence, it's doing what needs to be done. There's no glamour or need for reward in his simplistic approach.

"You really don't have to...you know," he busies himself retying his shoelaces. "pretend I'm not a disaster. It's okay to be uncomfortable – I mean, being uncomfortable with every gay person is wrong, but I, personally, don't care. I know you're not exactly...you're happy with Dr. Bloom."

Silence cuts through the waving static, the doctor going completely still. He tenses and Will wonders if he even breathes. There is hesitation, shock- a violence about him, Will can't place. Lightning strikes a treetop and the forest fire rages within an instant of his words. His misstep is palpable.

"If I were happy, wouldn't that imply the relationship would have never ended?" He asks, sitting back in his desk chair. "Or, that I still possess feelings for her?"

Will doesn't know what to say, amending the situation seems impossible.

"I can assure you, Will, the temporary relations were solely due to mutual convenience." He packs up the dishware, a calm expression smoothed carefully over his face. Will sits, stunned into silence, until the man's pager goes off. He follows out of habit, not necessity.

///

Mia meets them by an ER room, a rarity now that Will thinks of it. She has her hair pulled back, frantically glancing between Dr. Lecter and the nurses loading the teenage boy onto the bed.

"His name is Eric Powers, his father brought him in a few minutes ago. He complained of headaches in the months leading up. Today he suffered several small seizures, but when they got him in the car they escalated to grand mal. Multiple have elapsed since his time of arrival." She says, beckoning for them to come closer faster. "Currently, he's being administered a double dose of lorazepam."

As if on cue, one of the nurses calls out that the medication isn't working.

"Would phenobarbital work?" Will asks Dr. Lecter who observes the ordeal with mild consternation.

"Mia, get the oxygen mask, someone needs to load up the crash cart. Yes, try the phenobarbital." He says, pulling on gloves and following Mia, Will scrambling after him.

"He's going into v-fib!" The cart comes clattering in behind him, the operator squeezing gel onto the paddles as soon as it stops moving.

"Charging to 220," she states, the little electric hum making the hairs on the back of Will's neck stand on end. The boy jerks with the paddles, heartbeat still erratic and falling.

"Charging to 320," she says, pressing the metal plates to his chest.

"Sinus rhythm is reached," she wipes the paddles off before placing them back on the cart.

"Mia, get him an EEG and EKG, do a CT and an X-ray," Dr. Lecter orders, taking the kid's file from a different nurse on his way out. Eric's father waits in the hall, pouncing on Dr. Lecter as soon as he can see him.

"What's wrong with him?" he demands, moving to block Dr. Lecter's path.

"We don't know as of yet," he replies coolly. "I have ordered some tests to be done--"

"No, no what do you mean 'tests'? He can't have any, I don't authorize it!" The father moves in time with Dr. Lecter. "I will sue this hospital if you give him any tests."

"Mr. Powers, I apologize, but your son nearly died on the table. If we don't discover the cause of his seizures, he'll die."

“Can’t you figure that out without the tests?” he yells, throwing his hands in the doctor’s face. “I demand to speak with your manager.”

“Would you like your son to die?” Dr. Lecter asks, dropping the pleasantries. “If so, I’ll be happy to discharge him and allow you to take him home.”

The father falls silent, shocked that Dr. Lecter didn’t tolerate his outburst.

“What will it be? I have patients to tend to, which is a far better activity than allowing you to waste my time.” Will folds his arms over his stomach, pressing tightly to stave off the wave of crashing nausea. He watches Mr. Powers wrestle with himself, a deep, hidden motive stirring behind his outward tantrum. He is hiding something, something rooted in hate and demoralizing anger. Finally, he gives Dr. Lecter a curt nod.

“Only his head, though. No full-body scans, alright?” He asks, pointing at Dr. Lecter’s chest.

“There are no guarantees, but I will do my best.”

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After the tests are run, Will comes back to check on the kid’s blood pressure and vitals. He walks in, sheepishly asking the father to leave.

“Why?” He asks, standing defensively from the chair. “Whatever you need to do, you can do in front of me.”

“It’s procedure,” he says quietly, shying away from the reflecting frustration. “I can ask you to leave now, or I can call security.”

“Fine,” he says. “Fine, that’s just great. First my son has seizures, now I can’t even see him while the ‘tests’ are being done. What is wrong with you people?” he rants, even as he leaves and Will can shut the door behind him. The boy opens his eyes, wide with fear as Will picks up his file.

“Am I going to die?” He asks, voice hoarse and eyes tired. “You can be honest with me.”

“How old are you, Eric?” he asks, wrinkling his brows as he reads his short medical file.

“Sixteen,” he replies, shifting uncomfortably under the sheet. “Can you do something for me?”

“Sure,” Will says, sitting hesitantly in a chair by his bed.

“Is it possible for,” he clears his throat, blinking slowly in the dim lights. “Could you...” He fiddles with the heart monitor. “I want someone to come visit me without my dad knowing. Can you do that?” He asks, finally looking at Will.

“I’m not sure, it depends on who that someone is.” He answers.

“I don’t know if I want to tell you,” he whispers, looking down at his hands. “I don’t want to be treated differently.”

Will tilts his head, feeling the pendulum heavy and dangerous beginning to swing.

--//There's hands, violent hands on his body, words screamed without weight and crushing all at once. This is abuse, plain and simple. The father he met before is looming large, blood on his knuckles. Pain ebbs and thrums through him, hot salty tears painting his face and over his torn clothes.//--

Will doesn't want to be here. He knows who the guest is in relation to the boy and why he's here in the first place. A fall or a hit could rupture an aneurysm, which could cause grand mal seizures. The only test to reveal it would be an angiogram, something that would put the patient's life at stake. He bites his lip, gnawing at the tender flesh until blood rises to the surface.

"Is it your boyfriend?" He asks, voice teetering on the edge of hysteric and mimicked rage. The boy nods almost imperceptibly. "I'll see what I can do, where is his number?" He asks, fishing out a pen from his pocket. He writes the digits down as the boy recites them from memory on a sticky note. He lingers at the doorway, debating whether or not to tell the boy of his own complicated position, but unloading his problems on the child wouldn't help. He exits without a glance at the father. He ignores the questions as he gets on an elevator by himself. His head falls back against the wall, breathing turning ragged in the empty space. He has four floors to go, but ER elevators are fast and he's where he needs to be in no time. He follows the code displayed on his pager and heads out to the MRI building.

///

The results come back with devastating clarity. The room from before is covered in sheets of X-rays, CTs, and MRIs. The boy has more broken bones than untouched ones, little white lines illuminating the healing process.

"Abuse," Will murmurs to Dr. Lecter, hovering his finger over a spot with several interlocking fracture patterns. "This is abuse. We have to call child services."

"I am in complete agreement," the doctor replies, shifting some scans around to superimpose one on the other. "There is no other explanation. He is not osteoporotic, nor anemic. A healthy boy of sixteen should not have so many breaks without abuse."

"You guys need to see this," the MRI specialist says, holding out the last of the CTs. "This is the cranial scan you asked for. He has a skull fracture." He says, pointing out the white layers of growing bone.

"Let me guess," Will begins, holding the CT up to the light. "Dad beats kid for his suspected unsavory actions, bursts a subarachnoid hemorrhage, which in turn causes the seizures." Will says. "Next step is a cerebral angiography or a transcranial ultrasound to prove it." Dr. Lecter nods. He watches the pieces slide together, fitting and snapping into place. He could keep Will like this forever; blindly on the brink of devastating self-destruction, simultaneously feral and untamed. While he is a deeply emotional and sensitive person, Will Graham has never presented himself as anything other than his equal.

“I’ll get the father’s consent, Will, you call social services and get someone down here quickly.” Dr. Lecter hands Will the file, exiting the room hastily.

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After Will calls social services, Dr. Lecter informs Eric Powers’ father, Mike, of the situation. He adamantly denies any abuse and vehemently ignores the doctor’s warnings. Mike loses his mind with anger when security is called to forcibly separate the two of them. Once the father is quarantined down the hall in a meeting room, Will calls the number he scribbled down before. The line rings four times before anyone answers.

“Hello?” The voice is confident, a bright kind of self-assured youth. The part of Will that is Eric Powers calms substantially.

“Hi, I’m Dr. Graham, I’m an ER doctor at John-Hopkins...I’m calling because Eric Powers is here and wants to see you.”

For a while there is only breathing; quick, panicked breaths gasped into the receiver.

“Eric, you said?” He asks, voice hitching over the name.

“Um, yes.” Will nods, glancing back in the room where the boy sleeps, protected from his father.

“I would love to be there but I’m not so sure I’d be...accepted. Is his dad there?”

“Yes,” he answers, pausing. He wonders if telling the boy that the father is with social service agents is considered ethical, but he does anyway. “But, he’s a bit preoccupied with representatives from social services.”

There’s a choked sob from the other end, a heavy sigh of relief.

“Thank God,” he says, voice broken as he swallows around the lump in his throat. “You have no idea – no idea the things he did...I’ll be there, tell him- just tell him to hang in there for me.”

He assures him he will and hangs up, distractedly sorting through lab results to kill time.

Sometime later, a boy rushes up to the counter breathless.

“Eric Powers’ room?” the boy half-collapses on the faux-marble for support, worrying his bottom lip between his teeth. Will points to the room in the corner, finally empty enough for him to sneak the visitor in without anyone noticing.

“Thanks,” the boy takes off in a jog, yanking the door open only to stop in the threshold. Eric looks up, covering his mouth with one hand, the other extending to his guest. The other boy drops his wallet and keys into a chair and perches on the edge of the bed to hug him. They stay like that for a while, just holding each other, and Will is satisfied for the time being. He

decidedly lets go of the father issue and returns to his work. Custody of the child isn't what he needs to be worrying about. While he doesn't want his patient to spend the rest of his childhood in a foster home, there isn't a whole lot he can do about it.

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As the sun sets, Will finds himself pacing in Dr. Lecter's office. Hannibal stands relaxed by his desk, observing the war rage within a single man.

"What is the status of Eric Powers?" Hannibal asks. Will snorts, scrubbing both hands over his face.

"Critical, still. We can't insert a drain tube until the patient is more stable, nor can we do any surgery without parental consent or insurance."

"How does this make you feel?" He asks, knowing exactly what the response is going to be; another snort and Will collapsing into a chair.

"How does that make *you* feel?"

"Responsible," he answers, nodding as he sighs at the floor. "Overwhelmingly so, to the point of a sense of obligation." Will doesn't know what to say, so he says nothing at all.

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Two social service reps convene in the meeting room, accompanied by Dr. Chilton. Will's shoulders hunch forward as if to hide, to protect his most vulnerable pieces. Hannibal – the bastard – nominates Will as the ER intern to attend the meeting as well. The urge to strangle his supervisor returns, but he pockets it away as he deals with the most pressing matter.

The meeting room has one short table in the middle, four chairs on one side, a singular on the other. Three security guards stand by the door with two more inside. Apparently, Mike attempted to escape hospital custody once he was told of the social services visit. Will plants himself in the end seat, the two agents sitting between him and Dr. Chilton. The pair is a man and woman; both blonde, tall people with the air of a Marines drill sergeant (which just so happens to be exactly what the male half of the team was). Will folds his trembling hands in his lap, begging them to still. Dr. Chilton, clad in a three-piece suit, sits stoically at the end. He is an observer, rather than a doctor. His brows are perpetually set in the expression of someone who knew something you didn't; his lips curl up just slightly at the ends, but they bow downward in the middle enough to suggest he truly had no opinion on the matter. He regards Will with a single, lingering look meant to devour and settles pointedly in the chair.

The male agent sets up a video camera, pushing a few buttons before settling.

"Good evening, Mr. Powers," the man – Carlisle – begins, opening the manila folder containing every scan Johns-Hopkins took that morning. "I'm going to ask you a series of

questions, I'm going to need you to be honest." Mike curls his bottom lip over his teeth in a snarl, squinting his eyes.

"Okay," he says, voice barely above a whisper.

"How did Eric get these fractures?" The woman – Rhonda – asks, pushing an X-ray of the boy's chest toward him.

"I don't know."

"You don't know. Dr. Graham, what does this look like?" Carlisle motions for Rhonda to hand the sheet to him.

"A transverse undisplaced fracture of the manubrium," he says, barely even looking at the result paper.

"How could this have happened?" Rhonda asks, pen poised over her notepad.

"Any number of ways," Will's voice is slow, low, and trembling, but strong enough to fool Mike. "This kind of fracture could be the result of a car accident, a fall down a flight of stairs, blunt force trauma in the opposing direction of the fracture."

The meeting carries on like this for hours. First, Mike is questioned about the injury, then Will does his analysis of how the injury could have occurred. Rhonda writes down everything he says. Eventually, she leans over, muttering something to Carlisle about a search warrant. Mike remains confident in his release until the end, when Will has an idea. He scribbles down on Rhonda's paper a question, one she happily asks.

"When did you first suspect your son was gay?" She asks, looking at Mike with brazen assertion. He stutters, scrambling for some kind of curse that could convey his animosity.

"You- you can't- he is not I made sure of it!" He is purple in the face, hands slamming open-palmed against the table.

"By beating him?"

The room goes silent, Will suffocating on the tense fury radiating off of Mike. Minutes, hours go by with no response. Eventually, the fight is over and Mike writes his confession. It becomes clear that the mother is in no position to take her child. She lives in LA with a new husband and three children Eric hasn't met. Once the meeting is concluded, security handcuffs him and escorts him out the front entrance to a patrol car.

"Where will Eric go?" Will asks Rhonda, who stayed behind to pack up the camera.

"Probably into foster care until he turns eighteen, then, he's on his own." She zips up the black bag, folding the tapes into a separate pocket. Will nods, leaving her to her bag.

He can't let Eric go into foster care, he can't. He knows exactly what it's like to be passed around once your parent leaves and he won't let that happen again. He is in no position to

adopt the boy, nor does he want to. He wants to protect him, to shield him from the life he will have to endure.

He paces, hands tightly wound in his scrubs. He doesn't have any options, none. He holds his breath, making his lungs ache before returning to Olive's desk. He recognizes the build of Dr. Lecter, even as he is turned away from him, talking to a middle-aged couple.

"Where will he go?" the man asks, glancing at Eric's room. "Foster care?"

"If custody is not claimed by his aunt, then yes."

"Ethan we have to take him," his wife pleads, pressing both palms to her husband's chest. "I know, they're sixteen and that isn't love yet, but we've known him since he was a child, Ethan, please!"

As Ethan nods, Will fills with relief. Dr. Lecter shows them to the room Rhonda still occupies.

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"Today, I am marking as a success," Will announces as he enters the office. "Marginally so, but a success nonetheless."

"Marked progress is rare and rarely so tangible," Dr. Lecter smiles as Will packs up his things. "To what should we owe the change in attitude?" Will laughs, zipping up his messenger bag.

"Just the way today turned out," he shrugs.

"You were critical to the success of our case, that is something to be celebrated." Dr. Lecter adds, standing from his desk chair. "I assume you are feeling moderately contented?"

"You assume correctly," Will is giddy with the high from earlier, the adrenaline subsiding into something warm and comforting.

sublimis

Chapter Summary

sublimis (adj) latin: sublime

The thing about chronic anxiety is that it makes one forget that time is still moving. The sun rises and sets, but there doesn't seem to be an endgame or purpose for survival. Will has been in Baltimore for five months without giving a second thought to the holidays. A heavy, knotting dread sits high in his chest as the days slide by toward Christmas. He plans to spend his own holiday extras on Laika, spoiling her with brightly colored toys and expensive treats. He doesn't expect any gifts for Christmas, nor does he actually desire anything. All he wants is to lay low and be forgotten just for that week.

He doesn't even remember that Halloween and Thanksgiving come before that, so it's not really a surprise he forgets about October 31st.

Will pockets his pager, apologetically handing Olive a file for an epileptic adolescent.

"I have to take this, save it for me?" He asks, tapping his palm on the countertop as she sighs out a grumbling 'yes'. He forces a smile, turning to exit down the hall to the ER, but a stretcher comes in between him and his destination. Nothing is off about a gurney in an ER, nor is it uncommon for the paramedics to be laughing about the bizarre situations people find themselves in. This, however, is very odd indeed. The patient is clad in full gladiator gear, like if 300 and Gladiator had a baby and released it into the wild urban streets of Baltimore. The guy is laughing, which is a good sign, even as his leg is gushing blood onto the blue foam gurney slab. Will jumps back a few paces anyway, some primal urge to get away from a bleeding man in gladiator garb taking over. He giggles nervously, covering his mouth. The paramedic closest to him nods, eying him with interest. Will half turns back to the ER, which is filled with the likes of Gladiator. Wonderwoman sits on a bench, getting her knee wrapped by an ortho nurse. A hotdog missing a giant chunk from his bun lounges on a paper sheet, black eye and bloodied lip doing nothing to hinder his relaxing meditation.

Will ducks around a zombie stumbling in on crutches, going around to the room where he can see Dr. Lecter's silhouette. He enters in slowly, listening to the quiet murmuring.

"Six-year-old female, passed out during trick or treating," Dr. Lecter informs him, turning to speak. If Will concentrates, he imagines he can feel the way his lips would brush the skin just behind his ear, the breath puffing his cheek doesn't make the mental image any easier to wave away. He clears his throat, blinking away the unmade memories.

"It could be etiology of syncope, probably vasovagal," he whispers back, tilting his chin upward to expose the white skin of his neck. It's not appropriate, it's not something he needs to dwell on later, but he does note the flash of something dark in Dr. Lecter's eyes.

"Pulse?" He asks, tongue catching on the 'l', his mouth forming the word too carefully for casualty. He wonders, distantly, what he's doing here, what his motive is but he can't stop. Some twisted part of him wants to fill the gap between his lungs, not with love, exactly. He chooses to fill himself with fire and war, teeth and tearing. Dr. Lecter turns more toward Will, eyes mirroring the teasing Will is ashamed to acknowledge as his own.

"Thready," he whispers. "The nurses are doing chest compressions, point-one milligrams of atropine has been administered. An additional point-one milligram per kilogram of Versed mixed with point-three 3 milligrams per kilogram of succinylcholine. The nurse used the intubation kit to create a safe airway."

Will tears his eyes away from Dr. Lecter and watches the nurses work hastily. He scans over her chest when something snaps and he begins working.

"Get me an EKG, what's her rhythm?" he presses his fingers to the space where her ribcages connect. The bedside machine whirs to life, spitting out a ream of paper that he skims over.

"Sinus tach," the nurse says. "and observable low voltage."

"V-tach!" The EKG operator exclaims, tapping in the code for the crash cart. "We're losing her!"

"Okay-" Will takes a deep breath, squeezing his eyes closed. He rehearses the code over and over in his head, brain hitched on the processes as he stands completely still. "Pads, okay, pads. Hand me the pads-" the orange, squishy plates stick to the girl's chest, a protective coating for her fragile skin. "Clear!" The electric hum sticks to him like wet seaweed; harsh and itching.

"Rhythm's changing, P.E.A.!"

At this point, Will has no idea who is saying what but he acts accordingly, anyway.

"Get me point-zero-one milligrams per kilogram of epi and an amp of bicarb," he says, opening the IV.

"Bicarb's in."

"Resume chest compressions, you said the insulin, glucose, calcium, were all in, yeah?" He asks a nurse over his shoulder.

"Yes, but v-tach is returning--"

"Give me the paddles," the crash cart nurse gives them over. "Clear, get me another milligram of epinephrine, what's the rhythm?"

"Same as before, still no pulse." Will hovers a second, mind racing through the code that isn't working. It could be fluid buildup-

"Get me a 60cc syringe and 18-gauge needle," he says, taking the needle. He uses his thumb to measure forty-five degrees from the chest before inserting it slowly into the cardiovascular

canal. He holds his breath, pulling the plug toward him. The clear tube fills with milky pink fluid, he holds it up to show Dr. Lecter, only somewhat triumphantly.

“She’s stabilizing.”

“Pericardial effusion,” Will drops the syringe into a plastic bag, then into a nearby Styrofoam cooler. “Send this to the lab and notify cardio,” he says, turning away from the bed and taking the few paces back to Dr. Lecter. He folds his forearms tightly over his stomach. Dr. Lecter is appraising him, measuring worth against want and the fight is bloody and hard. The scales tip and lust overpowers responsibility just for a second, long enough for the heat of his gaze to singe Will’s skin. In the same second, his insides turn to jelly, legs threatening to give out. Tremors set in under his skin, butterflies lighting in his gut as he imagines the horrible, wonderful things Dr. Lecter desires of him and the sensation is heady and overwhelming. He’d give up everything in this moment to be at his mercies, which says more about him as prey than Dr. Lecter as a predator. Will wants to ask what they are, where he plans to take them, but he doesn’t. He doesn’t know if he’s prepared for the answer. The battle behind the doctor’s eyes stalls as circumstances shock the arousal into submission. Will knows he is quickly losing.

Thanksgiving passes uneventfully and Will has to simply administer insulin to a diabetic who ate an entire pecan pie he assumed was sugar free (plot twist, it wasn’t). Will spent the holiday with Brian and Jimmy, getting so many delivery pizzas they could make a fort out of boxes as their feast. They lounged and watched Pulp Fiction, eating pizza until they could barely breathe. In the silent spaces of the night, when Will is completely alone, he thinks of Dr. Lecter. He imagines what the doctor is doing, kept by his own company and the glittering shine of his dinner guests. Will doesn’t understand the draw Hannibal has to him. He knows the doctor believes in his imagination, his patience and oddly askew priorities, but why is that so abnormal? Hannibal has a very specific lifestyle, one that Will is only an observer to. He isn’t a chatter, or a routine entertainer, he’s just...plain. He gets all tangled in conversation, carrying the exchange with him for hours. He isn’t what Hannibal thinks he is, but he’ll keep that to himself. There’s no guarantee that the feelings are going to last, so why make a big deal out of nothing? He isn’t the right person for Dr. Lecter. Even as society is improving with acceptance, there are still so many people that would be morally offended by the renowned surgeon’s outing and while Hannibal has no patience for the sort, Will cares about what people think. He isn’t so important that he has to worry, but Hannibal is. It could ruin his career, force him into early retirement. It’s idealistic to believe Hannibal would meet no resistance, but there is a bit of hope it wouldn’t be a big deal. Will knows that the story of disaster he tells himself is untrue, but the prospect of Hannibal losing everything is the only thing to keep him from getting his hopes up. He won’t allow himself to be the person responsible. He nearly forgets what people were saying about the whole Dr. Bloom situation, how people were upset about it and she is a woman. He can only imagine the backlash he’s going to experience lest he forgets his place.

“Will, you’re being stupid.” Bev says through the static. Will chews on his thumbnail as he anxiously bounces his knee. He’s taking his evening break outside, sitting on a bench under the frosted branches of an oak tree. His book lays forgotten on his lap, water bottle freezing in the chill. November left Baltimore covered in a thin dusting of snow, the only reminder of Christmas that Will pays attention to. He needs the air, so he wrapped himself up in the wool-lined jacket he bought and tied a knitted scarf around his neck so he could stay warm as he kept his privacy.

“He’s obviously interested, why not go for it?”

“It’s not that easy Bev-”

“It is that easy, you – *you* – make it difficult.” She sighs on the other end, the grogginess completely gone from her voice. “Did you tell him about your birthday?” Will shakes his head, forgetting for a moment she can’t see him.

“No, I just...I haven’t had the time. It hasn’t come up. It’s not that important.”

“I think it is. If I had a six foot tall European specimen like you described that has said half of the things to me that he’s said to you, I would be all over it. Instantly.”

“But-”

“No buts, this is a but free zone. You’re going to talk to him about it, and I mean talk to him, by next year. You have no choice at this point, buddy.” Silence stretches between them, the static taking over the conversation once more. “I’m saving your lonely ass. You stole a dog, Will, if that’s not a cry for help I don’t know what is.”

Will takes his time making his way to Olive’s desk, folding his hands under his legs as he watches her hang up Christmas decorations.

“Don’t ask me about Hanukah or Id al-Fitr or Yule or the Winter Solstice, Adel in HR is taking care of all that. I just put up the decorations,” she says, hopping down from the chair she had stood on to stick ornaments from ceiling tiles. “Oh, two guys – real nerdy looking, like NASA released star babies into the hospital – wanted me to tell you they’re doing the tree in the lobby. They wanted you to come help.”

Will nods, laughing to himself. Jimmy and Brian didn’t look that bad, but the description certainly fit. He takes the elevator this time, happy to have a moment of respite.

The hospital tree wasn’t enormous, but what they lacked in height was compensated in sheer numbers. There were eight trees in the lobby, four on each side. Boxes piled in the middle overflowed with tinsel and ornaments, with nurses and doctors elbow deep in décor. The hospital lightens in cases toward midnight, so the doctors have time to spare. Will sets to

work next to Jimmy, opening a box labeled 'lights'. He works leisurely, untangling ropes of light strands.

"Here, hold this," Brian drops a loop of golden tinsel into Will's wind-mussed curls, snow still trapped in his locks. He smiles, allowing himself to forget himself as he works.

Dr. Lecter isn't surprised by the holiday mess taking up the lobby, he's surprised that Will is involved in it at all. He sits surrounded by long, crimped fairy lights, a circle of shining gold tucked in his hair. He doesn't seem to notice the accessory as he dives into another box. A twist of longing edges his ribs, dangerously teasing his jealous temper. He scans the lobby, suddenly horrified by the addition of mistletoe. It never bothered him before, but the prospect, no matter how slight, that Will could be someone else's for even a moment prods the envious rage into action. He allowed the patient from before, but not again. He won't let someone else take what is his, especially when it is so close to cognizance of belonging. He notes where the hateful little branches are, a new plan coming to light.

In the days following the decorating 'party', Will noticed he had a shadow; a tall, strong shadow with a gentle hand at his shoulder with every turn. His usual routes were changed, usually accompanied by a vague reason for novelty by Dr. Lecter. Slowly, the bundles of little red berries and waxy leaves disappeared. The maintenance staff claimed that a patient had complained of a health risk and the plants were to be disposed of.

When Will finally had a moment alone, he approached the one custodian who would answer his question.

"Which patient complained?" He asks, watching the man use a garbage claw to rip the plant from a doorframe.

"Dr. Lecter didn't say which patient, I didn't ask," he replies, stuffing the leafy bastard into a garbage bag. Will repeats Dr. Lecter's name, an uncontrollable smile working up his face. He has to turn his back and walk away to keep from being discovered.

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"I have noticed a significant improvement in you," Hannibal says as he places the rubber-stamped copy of his evaluation face-down onto the scanner. Will doesn't say anything, he's far too nervous to speak, but he nods. "Is there something new in your life?"

Will resists the urge to snort. Instead, he tilts his head just a little, stretching the skin below his jaw.

"No," he says evenly, carefully choosing his next step. "It's an opportunity."

The words light something warm in Dr. Lecter, a sunrise over a field. Will relaxes. He abandons his tragically melodramatic attempt at self-preservation and fixes his eyes on Dr.

Lecter's tie.

"Opportunity in occupation or living arrangements?" *Or love life*, Will adds to himself. The words are printed quite blatantly in the space between them, there is no imagining that.

"Neither," he replies coolly, splaying his fingers over the armrests of his chair. His knees part barely a centimeter, but the movement is captured. They don't break their near-eye contact, Hannibal merely steps to the side, footsteps almost silent against the rug. Unease settles in the pit of his stomach as Will realizes just how *quietly* the doctor can move - if he wasn't watching, he would have never even known that he was there. Hannibal lowers himself into the seat opposite, crossing one leg over the other. His heart pounds erratically in his throat, adrenaline coursing through his veins with sparks of heady arousal. Will swallows slowly, working his fingers against the leather.

"You are hopeful for the promise of the future, a new relationship perhaps?" He asks, expression one of a removed physician. Will breathes in carefully through his nose, tongue darting out to moisten his bottom lip.

"Possibly, the situation is still being determined." He answers, maintaining the same reflected aloofness, even as his ribs threaten to crack and dislodge. Dr. Lecter stands, crossing slowly behind his chair, fingers resting lightly on the back. There's a moment, a glimpse of that insatiable urge Will has noticed rise in his eyes before, the incessant compulsion to devour. Will's stomach drops as he realizes the mask is slipping, falling as starvation prevails and the shackles of control begin to shatter. He circles around behind Will's seat, his heart thudding hard and quick in his throat. Breath struggles to come, anticipation dizzying and thick, sickly sweet as he releases his urge to run, to flee. He is prey, a thrilling realization to cool the ravenous hunger settling deep in his stomach. Hannibal stands so close, one hand gripping the leather seat just behind Will's ear, the other resting somewhere out of sight. Will holds himself still, unmoving in the dim light of the office.

"Perhaps it may help if we maintain our candor," Hannibal's voice is low and dangerously calm, the words frayed with want. The clifftop is in full view again, but Will knows he won't resist this time, he won't deny himself any more. The ascetic drives are leaving him all at once, lust burning, searing just under his skin as he feels the doctor move to stand in front of him. "Show our cards together, shall we?" Dr. Lecter extends a hand, the gravity shifts: Will is falling - no, jumping as his body moving without thought. He takes the hand, fingers trembling. He stands, supported by the forearm pressing tightly to the small of his back. Hannibal places the hand in his possession to his own shoulder, the other moving in sync. His palm is warm and broad, resting with heavy gentleness at Will's cheek. His chest is sturdy and reliable, their bodies pressed tight and Will finally feels whole, complete. Tectonic plates slide into place, wires connecting and fizzling as puzzle pieces click together. The emptiness he carried since his mother passed is filled, almost to the point of being painful.

"Don't break me," he whispers, just on the edge of begging.

"I only wish to put you back together."

And Will submits. Their lips hover over one another's, their lungs filling with dry, sultry air and the first brush weakens his knees. The ache of longing returns and Hannibal finally,

finally, gives. The first press of lips is uncertain, punctuated by almost imperceptible gasps. Once Will becomes familiar with the intruding – it's not the right word, but it's all he can think – lips, the kisses become desperate. Teeth and tongue replace silent murmurs, Hannibal's hand tightening sharply in Will's hair. The bright burst of pain parts Will's lips, a movement replaced with a confident roll of tongue, drawing high gasps from him. They kiss feverishly, mouths unwavering as they indulge themselves. Each pull of lips settles comfortably in the wound Will can't heal by himself, filling it with comfortable attention. His back arches, letting him bend back as he is overtaken with the kiss he has chased for what feels like forever. He is ripped apart and repaired in waves, his hands clutching desperately at Hannibal's scrubs. A high, whining sound is sucked from him, his cheeks heating with forgotten embarrassment. Hannibal absorbs it greedily, his hands dropping to his waist, pulling him as close as possible, fingertips digging into flesh. Will catches Hannibal's lip with his teeth, stomach dropping and eyes fluttering with the soft groan it – *he* – causes. Hannibal breaks first, pulling away slightly and sighing a mildly surprised laugh as Will aimed to follow him. They stand, simply holding each other as time passes. Hannibal breaks the silence.

"I am here to consume you, completely and wholly," Hannibal murmurs. "But only when you are ready, of course."

A breath shudders through him, shaking with want. He tilts his face toward Hannibal's, kissing his acceptance.

gelusie

Chapter Summary

gelusie (adj) old french: jealous, of jealous heart

Uncapping the aspirin bottle, Will breathes a sigh of relief.

“Thanks,” he dumps two out into his palm and swallows them with his still-steeping tea. He nursed a headache all night, his brain refusing to relax after the whole...kissing ordeal with his supervisor. He passes the bottle back to Olive, who hums her dissatisfied reply.

He leans into the counter, drumming his fingers absently as he waits. His body is exhausted from being so keyed-up all night, but it refuses to relax. All he wants is something to do, something to keep him busy as he waits. Christmas is still two days away and he desperately needs something to keep him busy, occupied, engaged...

His pager buzzes, a code for a critically injured patient flashing across the little screen. He doesn't even think about his thermos as he leaves the desk.

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“DUI,” Dr. Lecter informs him as he scrubs his hands raw. “The passenger is stable, blood pressure and heart rate are both normal. Currently, she’s being taken to radiology. The driver is in critical condition, with an apparent blood alcohol of point-one-three. Possible neck fracture, GCS of seven, moderate respiratory distress. Neurology has been paged, also orthopedics.”

Will nods, pulling the mask down over his mouth. As Will enters the OR, his stomach drops.

This man is going to die.

There is no proof that this patient won't make it, just the horrible, wetly averse feeling settling in Will's stomach. The realization is intuitive, a crossing of axons with catastrophic results. The sensation reels in new waves of his migraine; he hasn't even touched the patient, the pendulum doesn't swing, he just *knows* that this man is going to die.

Will follows Dr. Lecter into the OR, shaking hands by his thighs as he draws nearer to the bleeding man. Crimson lines cross over his face, pooling in the corners of his eyes, the valley beneath his nose, and the divot under his bottom lip. His torso is contorted sickeningly, odd angles protruding from under his skin. So many things could be wrong with him, a disaster without a handbook. He won't be taken for a CT until he's moderately stable, which Will feels deeply like he won't. The portable X-ray machine will only reveal so much and there

are only hours, days if he's lucky, for them to figure it out. They won't, but Will doesn't say that.

The problem lies in the fact that regardless of where he stands with Dr. Lecter, this patient is going to die and inevitably send him back through weeks of "progress". He shivers under the heavy lights, feet moving as if submerged in molasses. The urge to run rears its head, tearing through him as he quietly observes the nurses' actions. They clear the sticky blood from his face with a broad sponge. As the crimson dissipates, a white, broad line of tissue appears. The break in flesh is nauseating; the skin bunched on either side, white subcutaneous tissue visible in the darkened OR.

"Will, you tend to the head wound," Dr. Lecter says quietly and Will follows without hesitation. He sets to work on sutures, something mindlessly easy. He rinses the abrasion with a cleansing solute and the anesthesiologist gives him the clear. Using his the softest part of his thumb, Will guides the broken flesh back to where it belongs. Glass shards reflect in the light and Will takes his time removing the slivers before suturing him up. Dr. Lecter is always the quiet observer, removed yet interested as he works. The bodily injuries are too involved to begin right away, the scans have been ordered but the stability is dependent on how well the wounds are stitched. He works the sutures carefully, making the wound tight and pressed. As he finishes, the patient is wheeled down to radiology.

For the duration of the hour the patient is away, Will spends it sitting in his usual seat. Something is off, a piece is out of place. Even as he felt so together just a night ago, the illusion is breaking at the seams, crumbling under new pressure. It's as if his center of gravity is toppling forward, pitching him away from his safety net. Hannibal knows, Will knows that he knows.

"That man is going to die," Will says, his voice breaking. He rubs his hands over his mouth, the trembling in his fingers spreading and metastasizing. Hannibal stops pacing, still as controlled and measured as was his signature. Will laughs under his breath, a bitter, nervous laugh. Panic knots in his stomach and chest, a hand around his heart threatening to squeeze. It's a nightmare that's beginning to unfold unfettered by the subconscious. "He's going to die and there is nothing I can do about it, he's going to leave his family behind and it's going to be my fault because I knew it was going to happen--"

Hannibal kneels in front of Will, taking his hands in his own. He shifts forward as Will buries his face in his neck. Warmth shudders the nervousness away, just for a moment. He is safe so long as he doesn't move from the doctor's side. It's almost pathetic how much of an influence a simple motion has.

"Will, you are capable of so much more," he murmurs. "The patient's ultimate outcome, regardless of severity, will not be your fault. I, myself, doubt how much assistance I may be of. His prognosis is grim; if we can save him, he will live to be better, but if he dies, that is not our doing."

Will doesn't say anything, just lets himself be held until his brain quietens. He sucks in a shaky breath, one hand breaking free to press himself as close as possible to Hannibal. He

wants him to understand the same way he does, to just *get it* the way he does. He wants to believe that Hannibal would try to do as he does, but he is sensible enough to not wish his horrid ‘gift’ on anyone else. His head throbs. He should have taken more of the aspirin Olive had.

The smell of blood hangs thick, burning Will’s eyes and nose as he reviews the CTs.

“Concussion, at least.” He mumbles to the doctors present. Brian is there with his supervisor, clasping a duffel bag full of equipment, along with Dr. Lu from neurology, and Dr. Lecter. “It looks like a herniated disc here,” he points to a vertebra in the upper portion of the victim’s neck. “Broken ribs resulting in pneumothorax,” he gestures to the darkened blot in the lower left segment of the left lung. “There appears to be a fracture in the upper tibia in the left leg and dislocation of the femoral head in the right.”

Dr. Lecter sighs.

“Start with the relocation of the femur, the head is still attached. Relocation should be the least difficult.” Dr. Hardwick jerks her chin in the direction of the patient and Brian nods, dropping the bag as he sets about the relocation.

“Will, you do the chest tube, drain the blood from the pneumothoracic lung.” The heaviness cultivating in Will’s chest drops suddenly, breaking through the temporary resolve Dr. Lecter had aided him in creating just minutes previous. He nods, one short, curt nod and he’s taking wiring and contraptions from nurses that probably know more about the procedure than he does. He squints, straining to mentally superimpose the CT over the operation site. He takes an automatic razor from a nurse and shaves the chest site as the first step in sterilization. There isn’t a lot to shave off, thank God, and he moves on to the cleansing wash with little hindrance. As the ultrasound is prepped, Will presses the ear closest to Brian to his shoulder, an attempt to block out the sickening slide of bone on flesh. He swallows, counting his breaths as the pendulum weighs heavy against his optic nerve. He closes his eyes – a moment of thoughtlessness – and the weight swings heavy.

--//crunching glass and bending metal, the scream of tires on pavement –

Will has been here before, the time with the woman in the rain, but this is worse—

--///the heady smell of alcohol on dirty clothes, blood mixing with eggnog and strips of tinsel in sunlight, her smile in slivers of sun bleached cloud cover and the world tips with ushering finality--//

From Will’s perspective, the OR is silent. Mouths move in slowed urgency, chaotic distribution of half-hearted attempts in a fight that is already lost. He takes the clear plastic tube from a nurse, the kind with a needle attachment. He eyes the black and white screen of the ultrasound, fingers prodding the soft skin, it’s not enough, not yet, if he does this first, he’ll cycle out old blood as new is sucked in through the puncture site--//

//--/it’s silent, deathly so as panic tangles with intoxicated euphoria, nothing makes sense, he can’t tell if he’s upside down or if he’s still in the car, but he can’t see, too much blood in his eyes, too heavy, salty, clotting and he’s slipping--//

“Dr. Lecter, shouldn’t we set the ribs first?” He asks, eyes and face assuming the practiced blank mask of indifference. Dr. Lecter says something and nods. Will wavers as he watches the surgical resetting of white bone. Dr. Hardwick does the work, her hands moving deftly and easily through an intricate maze of tissue and bone fragments. A drill is produced and she inserts titanium rods through the medullary canal for reinforcement purposes. He waits patiently as she sutures up the skin and Dr. Lecter takes over for the gauzing and sterilizing. He has the all-clear and he dips the needle into the skin, following the path he can easily see on the monitor above him.

Will was convinced that nothing would change after the events from the night previous. He was convinced that the kiss was just a kiss and wouldn't mean too much for the nature of the relationship. How wrong he was.

As Hannibal drew near to him, the work became tolerable, breath came with an ease he had never experienced before, especially in the OR. His hands seemed to work with the patient, not against him and just the realization that Hannibal is close brings new waves of fresh assurance. He felt the pendulum stop, the flashes beginning to fade as he works the tube into the center of the blood blossoming into bronchial fibers. Suction begins almost immediately after the tube clears the lung membrane and the bag begins to fill with dark, watery blood.

Will eats slowly, taking his time as he listens to Dr. Lecter speak to someone on the other end of the receiver. He takes short pulls from his thermos and tries to read the book he’s been working on since he got here. The call ends.

“I apologize,” he says, crossing one knee over the other. “How are you feeling?”

Will snorts a little before looking up from his lap.

“Fine.”

“Any plans for the holiday?”

“Not that I know of, I thought about picking up a couple of shifts here. My dog doesn’t exactly know it’s Christmas so she wouldn’t mind my absence.”

Dr. Lecter nods, folding his hands.

“Anything you would like to do?”

“Well,” he aptly feigns ignorance for a moment, squinting as he pretends to think of what he would like to be doing for the day. “There’s a music thing at the park Christmas night. It’s kind of casual, just an outdoor music thing. I’d like to do that.” He tries to phrase it so it didn’t sound like he’d been thinking about it all night (which he totally had been). “It starts at eight, you could come with me, if you don’t have anything...” his sentence fades, face flushing even as he tries to stave off rising embarrassment.

“Of course,” he says, eyes alight with something warm. Will wants to shake it off, wipe it from his own eyes where he is certain it’s reflected. The subtle change is astronomical in implications and Will doesn’t understand why. It’s just a thing, just a night out of his apartment with a friend. It’s no big deal, not at all.

///

“BP is falling, the bicarb and magnesium didn’t work. Code blue was activated about thirty seconds ago. EKG revealed nothing; no pulse, no echo, no tachycardia of any kind, he’s just crashing,” Mia says in one breath as soon as she sees Dr. Lecter. “Neuro couldn’t find anything, he’s concussed and will probably go into V-fib before the treatment will even begin to look promising.” Mia wrings her hands, eyes wide. Will’s throat seizes up, locked with anxious worst-case-scenarios he can’t overlook.

“Magnesium, you said?” Will asks, looking at the file again.

“Yes, it was tried and didn’t work.” Mia answers.

“Midazolam?” He asks, looking up from the paper at Mia.

“Um,” she glances back over her shoulder. “No, no I don’t think so.”

“Try it,” Dr. Lecter says. “It may work.”

“On it,” she says, bustling back into the OR.

Will watches from the observation room, eyes glossy and blank. He stands perfectly still, emptiness pressing every other emotion from him. Midazolam worked for a half hour, then the seizures set in. The only treatment available for severe left-brain seizures is to sever the corpus callosum – the archway between the left- and right-hemispheres of the brain. Neuro refused to perform the surgery on a patient still in the OR and the general consensus was to just call time of death. He had no outlying brain activity, his higher-order thinking was wiped and brain death was assumed.

The chest tube he inserted was removed, as was the oxygen mask and all the IVs. If the man had any hope for survival it is taken from him now. The bag of blood mocks him, taunting him with the weight of his shortcomings. Will turns from the glass. He clocks out before Dr. Lecter can realize he’s missing and heads home.

He doesn’t quite make it there. He sits on the balcony, watching cars drive by in the lit-up city. The urban planes glow against the sky in radiation-like haze. He chews his lower lip raw, ignoring the metallic taste of blood flowering on his tongue.

The glass door behind him opens and shuts, Dr. Lecter sitting cross-legged next to him on the cement balcony. They sit in silence, a comfortable kind of quiet where neither feels obligated to entertain the other with mindless chatter. Finally, Dr. Lecter breaks the quiet.

“You did everything you could, and so did everyone else. If the death is to be blamed, let it be distributed among us.”

///

Will's doorbell chimes fifteen minutes before eight, just like he asked. He pushes his glasses up his nose and steadies himself before answering.

Dr. Lecter wore dark slacks, a grey sweater pulled over a collared shirt and long, custom-tailored coat already dusted with snow.

Will didn't second-guess his own decision to do nearly the same, except he ditched the gloves for a set of warm mittens and slacks for jeans rolled at the ankles.

Hannibal smiles warmly, eyes crinkling at the edges.

“Shall we?”

///

The orchestra is small, a little group of the most elite players in the area. Instead of taking a seat in one of the formal, white, folding chairs, Will and Hannibal take a stroll. The park has a man-made lake in the middle, frozen from the December chill. They can hear the music in perfect clarity even as they stay a ways off, perched on the stone bridge over the pond.

"Care to dance?" Hannibal asks, leaning over the railing with a faint smile. His cheeks are rosy from the frigid wind and Will smiles.

"Um, sure. I don't know how, really."

"It's easy enough," he says, extending a hand that Will takes. Without thinking, Will rests his other hand on Hannibal's shoulder. He melts under the heat of his palm on his waist. Even through the layers of clothing, the contact burns straight through to his skin. Eventually, he wraps the arm around Hannibal, resting his mouth against his shoulder.

"Where did you learn?" Will asks, voice muffled by the wool.

"The boarding school I attended in Paris leaves no avenue untrodden," he replies, his warm breath fanning over the bare skin of Will's throat. His shudder rolls through him and there is no possible way Hannibal didn't feel it, too.

"Why are you attracted to me?" Will asks, he needs to know before it's too late, before the window closes and he'll never truly have his answer.

"Your unique perspective on the world is one I have yet to encounter. Understanding is hard to come by, yet you offer it readily in such high volumes without hesitation. It says a great deal about how you could have been of use to me. Looking strictly at your resume, I believed you would only be of professional interest, but you are so much more intoxicating than I had

anticipated. Once I had you here, I struggled to maintain a professional interest and found that I no longer had to."

Will presses closer and smiles, temporary satisfaction settling his crazed neurons.

///

"Oh - oh shit," Will giggles, buzzed from having so much mulled wine. "The steps iced over," he says, running his white fingers over one of the brick steps now covered in a layer of slick ice. The two hold each other for support and the system works for the first couple of stairs but by accident or a well-timed slip, they both end up on the ground, giggling together by the light of the streetlamp. Will feels the corner of the brick digging into his hip, but he doesn't mind, their breaths slowing as they settle. Will reaches up, tucking a blonde strand of Hannibal's hair back behind his ear.

A moment of anticipated hesitation passes before Will sits up on an elbow and closes the distance between them.

This kiss is different; languid and unhurried. They take their time, mouths moving in tandem. Will sighs into the kiss, electricity fizzling through his limbs as their tongues slide against each other. They part for air and Will keeps his eyes squeezed shut, as if to preserve the sensation.

"Merry Christmas, Will," he whispers, his mouth so close Will can taste the wine on his breath.

"Merry Christmas, Dr. Lecter."

massa

Chapter Summary

massa (v) arabic: to touch, to handle

Chapter Notes

SO just a bit about me, I have ADHD and my medication for it wasn't working anymore so I've switched to a new one and if the writing suffers a bit it's because I'm writing like 200 words a day. So...yeah. I'm going to keep going with updates though, so there's a good part :)

Suicide doesn't define a person, just the circumstances.

At least, that's what Will tells himself.

He stands a ways off, arms crossed, fingers white around each knuckle. He keeps away from the blast zone, the girl a bomb with a timer that's running out. Hannibal talks to her first, explaining the extent of her injuries. She never nods, her wide, glassy eyes locked on Will. Sometime later, she asks for a drink of water and Hannibal nods to the elderly nurse assigned to suicide patients.

She tried to slit her own throat, at least that's what her father said. The gash is long, thin, and deep, a pointed object had nicked a microscopic section of her jugular and she nearly bled to death. Will was in the ER before Dr. Lecter and, naturally, set to work before he had assistance. As he held her throbbing, bleeding neck, her eyes went milky. Her body was replaced with Will's father, his face set in a watery expression of despair. He wanted to let go, to jump away in fright, but he didn't. He clamped a hand over the wound and waited for Dr. Lecter to properly seal it up. She didn't wake for three days. Christmastime is supposed to be the most dangerous for patients suffering from depression, but Will never really grasped the idea of it happening to him. He held a life in his hands and nearly dropped it, but he didn't. She lived and she's alive right now. Will has to remind himself of it.

The weight of the pendulum is heavy behind his eyes and he pleads with himself for just this once, just this one time for it to be still. Gold and crimson mingle, groaning as it sets into a swing.

--//the mirror shatters in his anger, fury raging in unfamiliar irises. Fear replaces her own frustration as she cowers away from him. He takes a shard in one hand, a long, broad shard

tapering to a point on one end. There's pleading, but negotiations are over. She cries out as he takes a fistful of her hair, the makeshift blade piercing and shredding-

"Will, are you listening to me?"

Hannibal's voice strengthens into coherence, slimy static fading as Will blinks imagined blood from his eyes.

"No, I'm sorry." He says, shifting from one foot to the other. His eyes dart from the darkened crease in Hannibal's scrubs to the glossed ER tiles. "I...no. I wasn't."

Hannibal's eyes brim with unanswered questions and Will knows he's dying to ask each of them. Restraint is the only thing keeping whatever they are afloat. Will swallows the offering he doesn't want to extend and focuses his attention back on the tiny shadow under the girl's window.

"We'll need to ask her father a few questions."

"Me included?" Will raises a thumb to his chest, palm flatly exposed in uncertainty. He keeps his eyes away. The forts he worked so hard to build have started to crumble. He doesn't want to, he wants nothing more than an afternoon without any surprises. It's not looking very likely that it will ever happen.

"Yes, of course."

"My hands still smell like blood," he says, voice rising in hysteric indignation. Dr. Lecter doesn't say anything for a while, sighs through his nose and tucks the folder between elbow and side.

"Will, you don't need to say anything. I want you to come with me, your perception will be invaluable."

Will repeats the phrase in his mind, spitting it sourly to the imagined floor. He knows what this is about and if he sees Chilton he will lose whatever loose grip he has on his sanity.

"Mr. Hobbs, remind us once more about the events of Thursday night."

The balding man takes a shuddering breath, a thumb rubbing restlessly over his bottom lip. He rolls a Styrofoam cup in his other palm, eyes scanning anxiously over the tabletop.

"I came home from work, about," he clears his throat, "ten minutes before her mother got there. Abigail was upstairs, so I left her alone. When I went up to call her for dinner, that's when I saw her."

Will's eyes are blank, damp around the corners and dim in the pupils. It makes him look dangerous, angry beyond words and Hannibal thirsts for it. His thumb runs over the cap of

his pen, bending to feel the plastic protrusion. He leans back in his seat, throat working as he swallows. Hannibal tears his eyes away, pushing a pad of notes to Mr. Hobbs.

"This is what you told us last time. 'I came home from work early,'" - Will scribbles down a note that Dr. Lecter reads swiftly, not breaking his sentence (*he's going to run*) - "'Abigail and I had an argument, which she ended with a suicide attempt.' Now, which one is the correct story?"

Tension draws tight as a bow string, silence and stillness as the cogs of Hobbs' mind grind into gear. He pushes his chair away from the table and darts out into the hall.

Will doesn't stand, doesn't react. He keeps his eyes on a crack in the wall right at eye level. He wonders how it got there, if there are any more. He imagines it turning, twisting into a river. The water turns brown and grained, the wood from Hannibal's desk. Minutes or hours pass, he doesn't really care that much, before the local police station has arrested him on suspicion of attempted murder. Abigail's mother turns up dead in the same house and Will lengthens the distance between himself and the girl. Attempted murder is one thing, but having the 'attempted' part taken is wholly different. Garrett Jacob Hobbs' soul is tattered, pieces breaking as he has taken life. He is a murderer, a monster... Eventually, standing at the elevators is enough for him to feel the feverish heat radiating from the room he's so used to avoiding. Hannibal says it's unbecoming for him to avoid the girl he saved, but every time he draws close, the feelings are overwhelming. Red tendrils of wet, throbbing anger tangle and knot in his own anxiety and he knows he's not welcome.

"Will, take these pills to Abigail," Hannibal hands him a paper cup with four different pills in the bottom and a paper cone full of water. He doesn't argue, he follows instructions. He opens the door to her room and harsh, humid heat smokes into his eyes and mouth, singing his lungs-

"Here," he extends the cup containing the pills. She doesn't take it. She folds her arms over her chest and regards him with thick hostility.

"Why?"

"These will make you feel better."

"I don't want to feel better."

"Please, just take them."

Abigail's eyes swim with tears.

"I remember you," she says, voice moistened with desperate anger. "You're the one who saved my life."

"Usually people are happy about that. Take the pills, Abigail." His composure is wearing thin. He can't breathe without taking in her rage and violent despair and it's choking him.

"I didn't want you to save me, I wanted to be with Mom. I know what he did to her," her face contorts and she begins to cry, salty tears streaking her splotchy cheeks. Static hisses as the pendulum swing, quick, jerking images stringing together sloppily --//

//-- *blood and sweat, the smell of iron* --//

shattering of a mirror

screams cut short, a deep gurgling as words escape -- "I can't..."

yes you can mom

don't leave me please

please---//---/

Abigail takes the pills.

Will leaves.

He takes a walk, vomiting mightily as he works his way back to the ER. He slides down the divider of the stall, pressing his head between his knees as he snorts the smell of slaughter from his nose.

///

"How could you do that to me?" Will is shaking, trembling under his scrubs. He can't tell if it's more out of anger or anxiety, but it's devouring him whole. His vision hazes over with red, eyes stinging with hot tears. He won't cry, he *won't cry*-

"You wish to know how I could let you confront the very thing that has been keeping you awake at night? You watch news coverage of the case, you aren't sleeping, you haven't eaten in days. I gave you closure-"

"You gave me a heart attack!"

"You are in a hospital, could you imagine a safer place to go into cardiac arrest?"

Hannibal's face softens into a half-smile, the same half-smile Will got after Hannibal finally classified his feelings for him as more than "normal". Will fills with warmth; a radiant sunset over a white-sand beach. He needs a drink.

"You are going to be the death of me." The words come out before he realizes their weight, a flush creeping up his neck. Hannibal's mouth twists into a smile that is just slightly too tight, too full of teeth. Will huffs out a strangled laugh, collapsing heavily into the chair he's labeled as his own. *Oh what the hell*, Will sighs through clenched teeth and takes the plunge.

"And how would you go about killing me, Dr. Lecter?"

There's a pause. The silence stretches for so long, Will worries he's horribly misjudged the circumstances but at the last moment, the curtains lift for a fraction of a second and Will sees something, *something*...

"Why do you ask?"

"Everyone thinks about killing someone, one way or another." He shrugs, clearing his throat as discomfort settles in on him.

"I would do it as humanely as possible," he replies. It's not the truth, Will sees blood and tearing of flesh as teeth part tender skin, the sickeningly alluring contrast of crimson on pale skin...

"Of course," Will answers. For the first time, he knows he's not the only liar in the room.

///

11:07 PM from: brian

hey, haven't seen you in a while. how are things?

11:10 PM to: brian

everything's fine, thanks for asking.

Will pockets his phone, eyeing Hannibal as he gets into his car. Something about him doesn't set right, like an expertly cropped picture with minute overlaps. Will sees it. He wonders if he's the only one.

enamourer

Chapter Summary

enamourer (v) old french: to be filled, or to fill with love

Will taps his fingernails against the rough pattern of his steering wheel, trying to keep time with dewdrops falling fat from tree branches, to steady himself. He can't find the rhythm, can't settle. He closes his eyes, takes a breath as flashbulbs crack behind his retinas. He draws in another quick breath, pushing aside as much hazy static as he can manage. He exhales slowly, the breath turning white in the cold, ribbons of it spinning upward. He watches it contort in the breeze, expand upward over him as he exits his car. There are still several hours until he needs to be here for his shift and he forgets that it is New Year's Eve. He dawdles by the door until his watch hand ticks dangerously close to six-forty and enters the wetly cold lobby. Will changed their meeting time to six-forty-five on Wednesday mornings, at least until Abigail is discharged. She needs frequent psychiatric sessions and for some unknown reason, she insisted on speaking to only Hannibal. Will is exactly on time and Dr. Lecter opens the door before Will has the chance to knock.

Hannibal enjoys believing that it is by his own means that Will, like a well-trained pet, comes to their appointments precisely on time. He is not naïve enough to facilitate that kind of fantasy; Will is here because he wants to be, not due to Hannibal's own desires. Will enters cautiously, goes straight to his seat and sinks down into it. He does not wind aimlessly around the perimeter of the office as he so usually does. He does not trace his fingertips evenly over the passionate carvings of the desk, or over the patterns of cloth-bound bookends. He sits, knees pressed together and palms loose in his lap. He's anxious, backbone drawn up tight and Dr. Lecter knows, maybe just now or half a second after. His eyes settle on a box of tissues set out on the table, the potted plant shuffled centimeters away from its usual position. He resists a smile. They don't speak, not right away. Even as Hannibal moves to sit directly in front of him, he remains as silent as he permits himself to be. Finally, the shell breaks, scorched sugar cracking under silver edges. Will relents.

"How are you, Doctor?" It's cool, reserved. A fishing hook that Hannibal will have no choice but to stick himself on. Hannibal smiles, the corner of his mouth shifting upward.

"I am well."

Will's rod bends as the bait is taken, a small victory.

Hannibal watched as he broke his habit of reacquainting himself with the office, the skipped ritual that is surely noted. Will doesn't meet his eyes, but doesn't exactly remove his gaze altogether. This time when Will smiles it is simply a narrowing of his eyes.

"How are you faring?" Hannibal asks. So much passes in the second that Will meets his eyes and he isn't sure if breaking or holding it means losing. He breaks it anyway.

"I'm fine." He answers. His fingers splay against the fabric, fingertips desperate for traction. It doesn't prevent it, just frustrates his efforts. He should have taken his time.

Hannibal is patient in asking his next question.

"Your progress seems to be slowing, to what do you owe the change?"

Will sets his eyes on Hannibal's, determined to win the next round and swipes his tongue over his bottom lip which is bitten and sore from his drive.

"I feel restless," he replies, lips and teeth forming each syllable with gentle conciseness. "Like I'm on the brink of understanding, but something is holding me back. It's as if the thing I'm trying to understand doesn't want me to."

Hannibal's eyes narrow minutely, an unconscious interchange of emotion.

"And what is it you want understand?"

Will doesn't say anything, makes his gaze more direct. Realization flickers across Hannibal's features, a dangerous combination of withheld willingness and temptation. He doesn't speak as seconds tick by, the cogs in his brain expertly spinning the unspoken request into something acceptable.

"I am not like you, Will. Where I can leave a patient and return later, you take them with you. You carry their names in your mind, working them over for hours after you have left them. What you do is beyond my skill set, beyond most people in medicine. You cannot let go, you become someone other than yourself. It is fascinating to see."

They sit in tense silence as Will makes himself stop reeling.

"Patients stick, each of them vying for space where there is none. I am enough, there isn't room for anyone else." Will mutters in return, drawing fresh blood from the cut in his lip.

"So, you spend your time worrying about which ones you did right by so you may categorize them apart from those you feel as though you fell short of. Are you doing this for the purpose of reconciling your faults against your gains?" Hannibal does not look disgusted or confused. He has a singularly apt attention and Will tingles with the force of it all being unleashed on him at once. His tongue darts out to paint both lips glossy as he waits. He won't answer, he doesn't have to and he won't.

"Do you think of yourself as reconciled?" Will asks, thumbs pressing divots into the leather. Hannibal's eyes flicker to the movement, but return as soon as they are gone. His jaw tightens in unspoken irritation.

"I acknowledge my successes as much as I take responsibility for my faults," is his measured, even reply/

Silence surfaces again, rearing up as they sit tensely in the darkened office. The light of the desk lamp distorts their faces, making them glow orange and angled. Will is yet to achieve what he wants to and Hannibal watches his shoulders work - tense, then relax - as he re-centers his focus. He repeats his mantra, sighing through barely parted lips.

“I had a dream that I had died.” A match, furious and hungry, scrapes into life, burning and taking. The same hunger alights with ravenous jealousy behind Hannibal’s eyes; Will sees the questions bubble to the surface, each one tight and unspoken. Hannibal is affronted by the thought of another taking what is his – Will barring his neck for the passage of a gentle, expert blade, letting his lips fall open for a strangling palm. His jaw tightens as he pictures the life flickering from his eyes as someone else claimed. He swallows, tongue flattening away from his palette. “I wasn’t scared.” --//--hannibal parts skin, mouth greedy and sobering on each pull of blood--//--/

“I was accepting, calm. I trust you enough to let you kill me in the space of subconsciousness. What does that say about me?”

Hannibal doesn’t reply. He doesn’t breathe, just holds the used oxygen in his throat until the pressure releases.

“How did I do it?” Hannibal’s voice is low, rumbling deep in his chest.

“With your hands.”

The sharp intake of breath is silent, Hannibal himself nearly misses the reaction, but by the look on Will’s face, he didn’t. The round changes.

"You asked me about why I am here, but you didn't tell me why you are." Will says, sliding his fingers together. Hannibal's face tightens almost imperceptibly, and sits very still.

"What do you want to know?"

"Where did you grow up?" He asks. Maybe, maybe if he can get his hands on one detail, one little ounce of information, he'd understand a bit more.

"Paris, for the majority of my childhood." The reply is clipping, short and staccato. "So much so, that when I attempt to consider any time other than the boys' school I am fruitless."

///

“Abigail Hobbs arrived at the Johns-Hopkins emergency room at around seven o’clock Thursday evening, where ER surgeons treated her wounds. One of which was a traumatic laceration on her neck, barely missing her carotid artery...”

Will keeps his head bent as the reporter speaks to the television crew. He takes the steps up to the lobby two at a time, keeping his retrieved thermos close to his body.

///

Unusually so, the ER is quiet. Will mostly spent his time purging the stomachs of people with low-levels of alcohol poisoning. He helped pump a thirty-two-year-old woman's stomach just after lunch, which was just before the burn victims started to roll in. People that were way too drunk to be handling explosives started to stream into the ER, burnt from misused fireworks. He bandaged their hands and had to bite his lip to keep from smiling as he rubbed burn cream to where this guy's eyebrow should be. He thought that would be the most interesting thing of the day, but he was wrong.

"Will!" Olive calls, jogging down the hallway. "Will, you have to see this!" He follows her back down to one of the curtained-off ER beds, pulling the blue divider to the side. The sight startles a laugh out of him, which e immediately stamps down.

The guy in the bed lays half-dressed in his hospital gown, a blanket a desperate attempt to cover his lower half. The most notable feature is the painfully erect penis tenting the thin fabric. The guy is sweating more than anyone Will has ever seen in the ER, mouth open as he gasps big gulps of air.

"I took too much Viagra!" He exclaims, twisting one hand behind his head. "It won't go down!"

"Have you tried..." Will's question fades as he feels the laughter bubbling up in his chest.

"Yes. My wife is in the waiting room, she couldn't stop laughing."

"Can't blame her," Olive elbows Will in the ribs.

"Well, we'll have to drain the...the blood from..." He gestures vaguely to the man's crotch. "Yeah, I'm going to get someone to help us with this."

11:03pm to Hannibal:

if you need a laugh, there's a guy who overdosed on viagra in the ER right now.

11:04pm from Hannibal:

I'll be there within the next minute or so.

Will stands from the end of a gurney, barely able to contain his giggling as he leads Dr. Lecter to the other bed.

"He's forty-six, early onset erectile dysfunction." Will informs him quietly before parting the curtain.

Hannibal rubs a hand over his mouth to stop himself from laughing.

“Well, this is unusual.” He says. “We can drain some of the excess blood to relieve some pressure, but it requires a minimally invasive surgery.”

“I’ll do anything!” He cries, signing the papers with shaking hands.

///

In the street, people began to gather to watch the countdown projected onto the local bar. Will watched them from his usual perch on the balcony. Eleven-forty came and he was uncomfortably sober. He jumped as the door opened and closed, Hannibal joining him. He graciously took a glass and allowed Hannibal to fill it with amber champagne.

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

Will takes a long sip from the glass, hands trembling. The wind whipped into his face and neck, making his eyes water. He accepts the coat Hannibal offers him and wraps it tightly around his shoulders. He settles comfortably in it as the alcohol warms his insides.

“I never really got why people would kiss on New Year’s.” Will says, feet dangling off the edge of the concrete.

“It’s a promise.” Hannibal replies. “It’s a way for people to hope for the next year.”

“I guess.”

They return to their drinks. Eleven-fifty-seven.

“Hannibal?”

“Yes.”

“You’re the only reason I’ve stayed, I think.” He says, eyes down into his glass. “If it weren’t for you, I would’ve gotten a transfer. So, thanks.”

“I am learning from you as much as you are learning from me.”

Eleven-fifty-eight.

Will leaves his hand halfway between them, an unspoken offering. Hannibal takes it.

Eleven-fifty-nine.

“Hannibal?”

“Will.”

“I want...if you want to, of course, but...I would like to try to make it to next year...with you.”

Hannibal cups his cheek, turning his face toward him. Will can hear people counting down the seconds. His heart stutters in time with them and the distance is closed and they make a promise. It's cheesy and cliché, and Will would have found it disgusting if Hannibal were anyone other than Hannibal.

When they reenter the hospital, Will's hair is mussed from not just the wind and Hannibal's lips are quite obviously bitten red. Abigail meets Will's eyes and smiles. She scribbles something on a notepad and holds it up for them to see it. Will makes out the words "I CALLED IT".

///

Abigail is set to be released on a Friday night, January tenth. Her aunt and uncle came down to take her back with them to Minnesota. They said that being away from Baltimore would do her some good, let her finish school without being hounded about what happened. Hannibal agreed to sign her discharge papers, to let her leave two days early. She needed to get her belongings from her home and a bag was all the police would allow her to have. She filled it with clothing and books, the things she couldn't live without. Everything had to be cleared by the sheriff who came with her. Later, of course, she'd need to come back as a witness and so would Hannibal. As the attending, he knows the full extent of her file and Will is just glad he wouldn't have to be there. The date was set to be March twenty-seventh, months after being indicted.

Will is grateful for the couple, Collette and Morris, that opened their home for Abigail. They're tall, thin, wind-chafed people, the kind to take spontaneous hiking trips to the mountains for fresh air. Abigail will do well with them, Will is sure of it. She met with an endless array of psychiatrists and psychologists, all deeming her well enough to leave. He will miss her, oddly enough. She became his responsibility, a weight he became used to struggling with. Now that it is gone, he breathes without hesitation and it bothers him.

piedistallo

Chapter Summary

piedistallo (n) italian : pedestal

Chapter Notes

OKAY so last update was kind of a mistake, so I rewrote it and here's a better version.

Rooms, any kind, any color, any design, are full of static. Most people can't see it, they live in blissful ignorance of the invisible world Will must brave every day of his life. Waving lines that radiate from individual people to bounce off everyone else near to them. Will finds this exhausting. Instead of the static bouncing from him, his chest hangs open and raw, attracting and collecting the discarded energy. But Dr. Lecter is an anomaly. The air around him is thankfully, gratefully silent and still. The lines straighten, blur into nonexistence. It's an oasis, a spot of divine peace in a sea of rushing, deafening noise.

Will is a drowning sailor, desperate for the safety Hannibal brings, yet he is both the lighthouse and the storm.

(Grand mal seizures, CT revealed brain swelling, lumbar puncture scheduled for four o'clock)

"Will, you'll conduct the lumbar puncture at four o'clock."

The words jerk through him as if the ceiling had opened up in the pouring rain to drench him in icy water. Muscles contract under his skin, goosebumps skittering under his thin scrubs. He feels naked, even in three layers and a hot flush blossoming to color his cheeks. It's not unusual, it's welcome. He raises his cold, trembling thumb to stroke over the tiny ribs of his trachea, counting them as breath eases back. The anxiety cripples him more often than not, an ever-present reminder of his all too paralyzing shortcomings. It's routine. Will could make himself believe that the reaction is a biological reaction to a fear stimulus, making his anxiety normal. Routine. Banal.

But it's not. By now, the other students at the hospital have fallen into a rhythm and are thriving under their mentors. Will feels like the last piece of a puzzle that refuses to fit right, the last person still skittering about the edges. Hannibal has a way of making that feeling

disappear. Perhaps that's why he trusts him so much. Maybe it's the reason he, despite being terrified out of his mind, collects the local anesthetics from the drawer and follows the nurse anesthetist into a room down the hall.

He stays close to the walls, eyes wide as the man is turned over onto his side. The needle feels lead-heavy in his hands, swabs thick with yellow fluid. He approaches the bed hesitantly.

(swabs paint skin a sickly yellow tint, needle dives below the surface)

Will bites his lip hard, gasping as skin gives way. The point of the needle must pass between two lumbar vertebrae, collect a sample of cerebrospinal fluid, and retract out just as safely as it entered. The map of the man's spine lays out in Will's mind. He sees it even as he is blind. The entire room is silent. Will doesn't breathe.

(retract syringe, collect fluid sample)

The pump hisses and bubbles, the nurse holding the patient on his side averts her gaze. Will blinks her nervousness from his eyes and gingerly tugs the needle from the man's back. There's enough fluid for testing, at least according to the nurse anesthetist. He unscrews the needle and pumps the sample into a test tube, one he takes down to the lab himself.

///

The lab is in complete chaos. At least that's what it looks like to an outside viewer. The usual person he speaks with at the desk is MIA and he doesn't have the nerve to disturb anyone else already immersed in another case. He glances over both shoulders before he takes a seat at an unused microscope. This is the time to prove to his admissions counselor that all those molecular biology courses weren't a waste. He prepares a slide, giving his hands something to do that's mindless and easy. The steps are universal, there aren't any lives at stake if he goofs on a slide and redoes it. He can take his time and focus.

He shifts in his seat, pressing the lenses of his glasses against the eyepiece.

///

"Dr. Lecter!" Will darts around a nurse carrying bedpans and drops a textbook onto the nurses' station. Hannibal looks up from his own sheet of results to listen. "Okay, this is *haemophilus influenzae*," he taps his fingers on a giant black-and-white rendering of the microscopic bacteria. "This is the most common cause of bacterial meningitis. This is what we- I found in his cerebrospinal fluid." Hannibal takes the sheet of printer paper from the book, comparing the two bacteria. "I already checked with radiology, his CT showed minor brain swelling which is the most likely cause of his seizures."

"Very good, Will," Hannibal scribbles something down on the guy's file, passing it to Mia as she walks past. "Start Mr. Winstead on that prescription."

///

Will's stress has not improved in any capacity, even as they continue their meetings. Will knows this as much as Dr. Lecter, it colors their conversations, so much so it might as well be painted in the air between them. Will is running out of options, cornered and pressed for any stringent tangles of comfort.

In previous years, he would turn to sex to loosen his mind and free him for just an hour or so. But since he's been at Johns-Hopkins, he hasn't had the peace of mind to even masturbate. Perhaps this lack of stimulation is exacerbating his problems. In fact, this is exactly what Hannibal says to him in their meeting on Tuesday.

"How have you been sleeping?" Hannibal asks him during their meeting. Will hesitates, recalling that the past four or five nights, he hadn't slept more than three or four hours.

"Not very well," he admits. He doesn't want to put up a fight today, he'd rather allow this moment of unexpected submission than prolong his episodes of insomnia. Hannibal's face softens at the candor and Will wonders if anyone else has quite this kind of relationship (no, they don't).

"Is anxiety still to blame?"

"You could say that."

A pause, thick and heavy hangs stringent between them. There isn't so much of a struggle as there is a questioning glance from Hannibal. Will sighs, smiling. He should have seen this coming.

"It's a lot of things, but I'm tired tonight. Maybe it won't be too much of an issue tonight."

"Hopefully it isn't. I much prefer you to be well-rested."

"You and me both."

Hannibal waits a long time before saying anything else.

"I believe you would have a better sense of yourself if you experienced more frequent positive neurotransmitter floods."

Hannibal has a leg crossed, eyes tranquil.

"Like...dopamine?"

"And serotonin. Both are invaluable to us. Diet is a near-direct pump for serotonin, along with frequent exercise."

"You're not going to prescribe me anything, right? No SSRIs, MAOIs...anxiolytics..." The last thing Will needs is a prescription to keep track of.

“I’m not interested in medicating you, Will. Forgiving the ethics of my doing so, I don’t believe medication is the end-all of psychiatric discussions.”

“So what do I do? I walk Laika three times a day, I’ve tried that herbal-chamomile-white-tea-Russian-bee-pollen-elixir shit that every grad student swears by. They worked marginally, mediocre at best, if I’m honest.”

Hannibal’s lips twitch upward in a small expression of amusement.

“Perhaps you would benefit from a more passive approach.” Will doesn’t answer, mainly because it isn’t a question and he isn’t sure of what he would say. “There is an old form of meditation from the east, currently it is in full resurgence among homeopathic massage therapists. It requires a great deal of trust to experience in its entirety.”

“Does it involve some kind of fire treatment? Like when they do those hot suction cup things?”

Hannibal does laugh, but it’s quiet and Will is certain it’s only because Hannibal knows what the answer is and the question was inherently illogical.

“No, it does not.”

“What is it?” Will’s hesitation shows in his slow draw of breath (he wants to stop wanting, but he doesn’t want the answer).

“As I said before, it is primarily focused on relaxation and meditation, but there is inherent sensuality. To begin, you would need to choose a partner with which you would conduct this activity. You would find a comfortable location a day in advance and arrange it in any way you like. Then, when you are ready, you would lie on your stomach and the partner you have chosen would simply massage you for as long as you would like.”

Will’s face is burning, all the way up to the tips of his ears. He’s never blushed this hard in his life, he’s sure of it. He crosses his arms over his stomach, wrists pressed tight to his abdomen. He can’t imagine Hannibal doing something so mundane as rubbing someone’s back. So, this is more expected. Stripping down to almost nothing in the name of meditation and eastern philosophy. It’s almost as endearing as it is terrifying. He hasn’t had anyone do that for him before.

“Does it…” he clears his throat, eyes locked on his shoes. “Does it work?”

“It’s success rate is extremely persuasive. Many of those who experience it return to the practice regularly.”

Everything is sore. Everything from his neck down hurts. He feels like a ninety-year-old arthritis patient every morning and even Laika has noticed.

“Um…alright. Okay, I’ll try it.”

“Wonderful-”

“But only if you’re my person.”

Silence fills the office, thick and dizzying. Red hot sparks of ash against alight his cheeks, passion rearing up behind Hannibal’s eyes. It is comfortable, now he has weeks he has had to become acquainted with his many landscapes. He cherishes the knowledge that after all this time, he still elicits the same fiery haze.

“Will...”

“I don’t trust anyone else here. You’re it, the only one.”

Hannibal doesn’t respond. Will counts the seconds ticking away, unforeseen dread collecting in the pit of his stomach.

“Shall we meet at your apartment?”

“I’d like to, I’m more comfortable there. That what this is all about, right?”

“Of course.”

Hannibal rubs his thumb over his bottom lip, eyes warm with something Will can’t name. It isn’t lust or desire, just...heat. Will wants nothing more than to warm his hands by it.

pellagra

Chapter Summary

pellagra (n/v), old Italian : the skin, the act of skinning an animal, or to handle one's skin

Chapter Notes

so I wrote instead of doing the extra makeup work so here, have some smut.

The room down the hall does not exist, at least to him and not anymore. It sickens him so much he couldn't look at it. It, whatever meaning he had assigned to 'it' was jumbled, hopelessly entangled with the perfume of blood and isopropyl alcohol. He pulls himself together as best he can, convulses with anger, and replies dryly:

"How does that make *you* feel?"

Dr. Lecter doesn't answer, not right away and the pause is just long enough for Will to get up and leave.

///

A sort of sweetish sickness – highly unpleasant – falls upon him at once in a thick, humid blanket. Blue tiles caress white ones in a strange pattern on the floor. He drops into a seat somewhere (he thinks he might be in geriatrics). The colors around him begin to spin in mocking, twisting, circles. The nausea has not left him, it holds and cradles him tightly. In another room, a heart monitor marches courageously onward, the sound a macabre sort of metronome. This, too, triggers the illness in him. No – it isn't within him anymore, not confined to his head and heart, it is free. He can feel it *out there*: in the room, in the tiles, in the monitor, in his own hands, filling and pressing until *he* is the one inside *it*.

///

It does not matter that he is drowning. Death matters, which is what follows drowning and what somehow has a hold of him. He bobs against the surface once (gasp), twice (he doesn't try as hard to breathe), thrice (life shivers stubbornly through him, he gasps again), before sinking, limp and effortless, into the lake's black water.

Years ago, a hiker spent her vacation in Iceland. She, a friend, and their dog went out early one morning to the frozen lake near their rented cabin. She slipped and fell, plunging underneath the glacier surface. The water temperature hovered around freezing most of the year, chilling her body until rescue teams could finally extract her. She was warmed by blankets and space heaters until she regained consciousness. Remarkably, her brain function was normal and had not been impaired by its dive, she sustained minimal organ damage. Rescue came to the conclusion the water acts as a natural preservative, reducing metabolism for the duration of a drowning. Cell division slows, enzyme activity drops. The victim is dying slowly.

Will is experiencing the same phenomena, feet below Lake Opal's surface. He does not care about the man and dog who saw him fall in, not yet. He needs to remember feeling at ease, feeling weightless. He needs to know it as he once did.

Earlier, he sat with his feet dangling over the dock's edge. He held his hands straight out in front of him, moving through pale morning light. He turned his palms away from it, watching the light transform. It caught on his sleeve, lighting his January coat. Something has happened to him, he can't deny or outpace it any longer. It has encroached with clever tact, easing upon him so slowly he hadn't noticed quickly enough. It came like a dormant sickness prodded into wakening. Once it gained a foothold, a grasp on his brain or spine (perhaps both, even), it stayed quiet enough for Will to convince himself nothing was the matter and to blame his paranoia. But he can do this no longer: the sick is metastasizing.

He noticed it the other morning in the way he held his toothbrush. It was strange, foreign. His thumb fell under his palm, fingers curled away from one another. It was a way to hold it, in fact, many people hold theirs in this exact way, but it is foreign because *he* does not hold his toothbrush like this. He caught himself holding a syringe in the same way, his eyes wide as if the hand belonged to someone else. He was greeted by Brian and it took several seconds for Will to recognize him. He stopped short of his apartment door, on his way out to do something when he felt in his hand something new. It felt personable and familiar, but odd since it was clasped in his hand without him going to pick it up. He turned over his palm and opened it. It was Laika's leash and she sat dejectedly by the door. Is he the one who has changed? If not, then it is his home, his scalpels, his toothbrush.

Softly, softly. He is happy, content, suspended. He can no longer feel the rustling slippage of time. Pictures burn behind his closed eyes, seared on the black water. An eclipse, a ring of light and golden shadows. They glimmer, then fade. Deeper, he sees a swirling mass of violet starbursts, each burning brighter than the last. Diamonds crystalize and burst, shards scattering in every direction. Finally, the visions settle. He is again at peace. He can't breathe, but the feeling is not new. The shine is worn from it, tarnished and deflowered now. He cannot distinguish his body from the water, he may be dissolving in it. The pressure of the depths is finally as harsh and suffocating as it is inside him. His sickness is gone and he only has room for peace: slick, slippery peace.

Will returns to work the next morning, coated in a cold, blue haze. At the very least, blue has seeped through his skin to stain his soul. Hannibal notices as soon as he lays his eyes on him.

Will knows by the quick lift of his brow, downturn in his lips. Will stands sheepish and weary in the doorway, suddenly apprehensive about crossing the office's threshold. The decision is not his to make as Hannibal is across the room in an instant with a vice grip on Will's wrist to tug him in. He shuts the door with his foot behind him. One of Hannibal's arms wraps tight around his waist, pressing him as close as possible to his chest. The other hand grips the nape of his neck, Hannibal burying his face in the junction of his neck and shoulder. Will threads his fingers through his hair, his chest flooding with a need he can't assign either of their names to, responsibility is mutual.

"You could have drowned." The room spins, twirling on an unseen axis. It angers the sick in him so much he must squeeze his eyes shut.

"Who told you?"

"Paramedics are gossips, I heard this morning. You're lucky you weren't brought here, I wouldn't have allowed you to go home so early." Hannibal's lips trace his skin with every syllable, goosebumps skittering down his arm. They hold each other, silence thick and heavy.

"Was this a suicide attempt?" The question was inevitable, one Will could not imagine being able to get away without answering. His throat tightens sharply in mimicked agony. He sighs through his nose, tightening his hold on his hair. He shakes his head. That is enough for now.

///

Anxiety flutters about his heart: seething, then settling. He can see it when he closes his eyes (pink and erratic).

Hannibal hushes him, that's when he is reminded of his own noises. Firm hands press soothing circles into the tight knots his muscles have wound themselves into. He hadn't realized how stiff he had become until Hannibal's unsurprisingly apt fingertips set about loosening him up. The hard compressions by his neck are equally painful and pleasant, which, somehow, Hannibal knows. After focusing on the places that hurt, he moved to more satisfying areas.

Squeezing his eyes shut, Will sighs sharply through his nose. His spine bows of its own accord (he wills it to stop, but it does not help). His body betrays him, responding instantly to the touches and caresses, relishing in it even.

"You seem to be enjoying our time together," Hannibal murmurs. Will can only make a small groan, muffled by his arms. His skin is suddenly very hot, feverish and trembling.

"Wait," he lifts his head enough to reach out a hand, twining their fingers together. He presses each fingertip to his lips, printing them on his skin. It's just a precaution, enough evidence to use should he go missing or turn up dead (not that Hannibal would be so careless to leave any part of him behind). Will rests his cheek to the back of Hannibal's hand and breathes, copying the scent clouding at the pulse point inside his wrist to memory. He is overcome by emotion, wrapped up and strangled by it. Hannibal, who has saved so many lives and cultivated healing in the sick and dying, is directing the same attention to him, a hospital intern with too much to prove.

"You're too kind to me," he mutters into his skin.

“There is no such thing, not with you.”

He sits up, temporarily returning the hand to whom it belongs. He reorients himself so his body can face Hannibal, not that it matters that much. He keeps his face turned downward, shielded by shadow and angle. He tangles their fingers together; his translucent hands starkly contrast against the tanned skin stretched over broad knuckles. His stomach flips. He wonders how they would feel inside him. He doesn't need to know, not yet.

“I'm going to put on a jacket, I'll be right back,” he says, suddenly uncomfortable being so bare. He scrambles to pull on a blue hoodie, purposely ignoring his reflection on his way back to the living room. When he returns, Hannibal is sitting on the sofa, palms against the soft pleather cushions. Will settles next to him, picking up the hand occupying his seat. He splays the darker, broader fingers between his palms, feeling each ridge, crease, and scar. Something – perhaps his change in mind – makes him bold. There is some satisfaction knowing that his hands are smaller than Hannibal's, not by much, just enough to tell them apart. Their breathing, solely, fills the room, dancing atop silence on tiptoes. His blood curdles, veins bruising themselves purple with ravenous hunger for touch. It takes his breath away, how fast this change overcomes him. Hannibal must feel it, too, because his sharp intake of breath (following a low something, a sound Will couldn't repeat for how ephemeral it was) is loud enough to hear. Will tucks his legs under him, knees brushing Hannibal's thigh. He reaches forward, settling his hand at the juncture of Hannibal's neck and shoulder. Will sets Hannibal's hand to his own waist, eyes drooping. They are too heavy to keep open.

Slowly, gently, Hannibal rests his other fingers against Will's jugular.

“Your heart is pounding,” he says, voice low. Will allows his eyes so slide shut, a seal of lurching finality.

“Yes.” He replies.

“Why?” It isn't a question so much as it is a suggestion, a hint of prideful teasing about it. “Are you afraid?”

“No,” he lies, the pads of Hannibal's fingers tracing comets that burn and simmer into his collarbones. He jumps as lips form a suction on the pulse point under his jaw, fingers flying to the older man's hair.

“It is a wonder your heart has not burst if this is how it scurries along every time you are anxious,” Will doesn't have the presence of mind to be offended, his neck bows into the kiss, a sigh escaping his nose. He presses his eyes shut against the horribly scorching image of lava burns into his mind, ash filling his lungs and magma stealing down his throat.

“I see you,” he says, voice scarcely above a whimper. “I see you.”

“I know. You, only you. At least, you are the only one alive.” Terror flutters in his chest – again, Hannibal must feel it, because the hand that was once on his throat presses firmly to his breastbone as if to still it.

“I see you and I want you all the same. What does that say about me?”

Hannibal smiles, teeth nudging into the sensitive, bruised flesh of his neck.

“You dance the tightrope of self-destruction, most fall over one side or the other without any thought. You stay, defiant and trembling between them. To others it would be distressing, but self-destruction to a romantic is positively ravishing.” Will can’t live another second without feeling the lips that form those strange words against his own.

“Kiss me,” he sighs, parting his lips to taste the remnants of Hannibal’s testimony that hang glittering in the breath pooling between them. He barely has time to gasp a breath before Hannibal’s lips meet his in a hungry, passionate tangle of lips, teeth, and tongue. Hannibal’s arm wraps tight around Will’s waist, pulling him as close as the sofa allows. Dopamine floods Will’s brain, the neurotransmitters shaking into a vibrating, surging frenzy at the low, growling noise Hannibal makes. His stomach knots, his head swimming, but he doesn’t part for air. He doesn’t need it, not yet. He will need it when he is blue and limp, not while he is flushed pink and alive. The feeling reminds him of the lake, the water pressure that nearly killed him. He again feels weightless, suspended, Hannibal the only anchor he cares to be tethered to.

There is wilderness and ferocity edging the ways Hannibal touches him; a promise of consumption and complete devouring. Will doesn’t resist it, not anymore, not because he doesn’t want to, but he *can*’t. A high-pitched whimpering sound flutters breathlessly between them, burnt sugar singeing their tongues. Will is acutely aware that he is the one who made it, but he cannot bring himself to be ashamed. He is also aware of how he curves and bends tightly against Hannibal’s body, twitching with electricity. There is a faint, pink, coppery flower blossoming under his tongue where his lip has caught on Hannibal’s teeth. The blood exchanges in a display so wrought with intimacy that Will wants to turn away, shield his aching chest from it. Hannibal catches the faint ribbons of it, tracing the cut with his tongue. Dendrites fizzle, crossing instantaneously to surface the revelation that the taste of his blood is being savored. The realization is so unsettling he begins to panic, struggling against it.

It does not get very far; Hannibal parts his legs, laying him back against the sofa. He hooks a leg around Hannibal’s hip and the fight leaves him. They lay like this for a while, the kiss growing more gentle and soft. For a brief moment, Will is left to wonder why, until he hears the whining, distressed sounds he had been making, the only thing that could convince Hannibal to reassert a modicum of self-control.

“We can-” Hannibal kisses him lazily, breaking Will’s sentence as their lips slide together seamlessly, “-I want you.”

Hannibal makes a low growling noise, picking him up in a swift movement that makes Will’s head spin. He hardly has the wits about him to hook his legs around Hannibal’s waist. Will grips Hannibal’s hair, desperate to keep their mouths locked. He can’t contain himself, he kisses down Hannibal’s neck, sucking a pale mark to his skin as a form of his own possession. Hannibal pushes his door open, setting Will back on his own feet.

He is surprisingly careful as he removes Will’s clothes, he is certainly the neatest partner he has been with. His hoodie is folded in half, then tossed into a tidy pile. Will hurries to follow suit, making quick work of the buttons on Hannibal’s shirt, struggling with a couple of them in his haste. Hannibal takes his wrists, ducking to press a chaste kiss to his mouth.

“There is no hurry, we have all night.”

He curls his fingers around Hannibal’s collar, pushing the pale blue shirt off his shoulders. The remaining clothing is discarded carefully, with Hannibal leading the two to bed. He kisses Will slowly, softly, murmuring into his mouth: “You are so beautiful,” as he combs Will’s stray curls from his eyes. Will fists Hannibal’s hair, letting out a soft whimper as they tangle together atop his bed. Hannibal grazes a flat palm over the planes and ridges of Will’s torso, each press of his fingertips draws a shaky gasp and arch of his back. Hannibal’s hands guide him over on his stomach, knees spread in a way that was equally mortifying and arousing. Hannibal could see *everything*, could even touch it if he so desires. Which is a nearly certain outcome, one that is cemented with Hannibal’s inquiry of lubricant. Will throws out a hand, grasping blindly into his open nightstand drawer for the bottle he knows is stowed away. Hannibal takes it, setting it to the side for the moment. He traces his palms over the backs of Will’s slim legs, which are already shaking from anticipation. He hears the bottle open and squirt out the oil into Hannibal’s waiting palm. The pads of his fingers trace over the tense ring of muscle, smearing lube in tight, messy circles. He hisses at the long slide of Hannibal’s first finger, tensing around it.

“Hush, try to relax for me.” Hannibal is aware of the affect his voice has on the Americans he is surrounded by, but above all, he is aware how much it heats Will’s skin when used in the right way. He rolls his vowels a little, slurring them enough to flush Will’s skin quite nicely and to make him obey the request almost immediately. Hannibal knows he is trying and rewards his efforts with a firm clockwise turn that makes Will yelp in surprise. After adding a second finger, Hannibal lingers a bit, languidly stroking his inner walls before hooking up past the last knuckle and giving his sweet spot a hard massage. Will cries out, fisting the sheets as his talented fingers give him such a working over it seemed as if he were being paid for it. Every so often, the friction and suction created wet, undignified noises (no more wanton than those Will himself is making). Hannibal works up another finger and pumps them several times before he is satisfied.

Will turns back over of his own volition, but Hannibal is seemingly pleased by his actions. Will squeezes his eyes shut, reaching out to entwine his fingers with Hannibal’s as he waited for the next step in their evening plans. Will wraps a leg around his waist, tremors shuddering under his skin as Hannibal pushes in to the hilt in small, smooth thrusts. Will hugs his arms around Hannibal’s shoulders, pulling him close enough to breathe his appreciation by Hannibal’s ear. The sex is far superior than anything he has ever experienced before. His body aches with the effort he exerts in working toward his prostate. Hannibal reward this with several hard thrusts against his prostate, ones so heavenly and sweet he could cry with it.

Hannibal takes his time, pressing encouraging kisses to his collarbones. The realization pulls some lever in him, dropping heavy in his stomach. He has never been loved like this before and he knows he will never be loved like this again.

“Hannibal,” he gasps, choking on the tears building behind his eyes. His chest flutters and before he can stop, he is crying.

“What’s wrong? Will, would you like to stop?”

He shakes his head, burying his face.

“No! No, please, I-” his hips roll in time with Hannibal’s, electricity shooting up his spine.
“You’re just so good to me,” he says, reaching between them to stroke himself.

“And you to me, you are everything to me.”

Will gasps again, body drawing tight as a bowstring as his orgasm tingles in his toes, making them curl. He tries to force himself to take deep breaths, but as he comes in pearly bursts, the breaths turn into high, thin whines. He goes rigid, letting his orgasm take hold of him.

“That’s it, perfect, you are so good to me,” Hannibal murmurs, then the words twist into foreign sentences, ones Will does not understand. His body seizes up with intense aftershocks as Hannibal works to finish himself. He groans Will’s name, pulling out in time to keep the mess on his bedsheets. As hot and sweaty as he is, Will wants nothing more than to hold Hannibal close, breathe in the smell of his aftershave and sleep as deeply as he has for as long as he can remember.

And he does.

aubade

Chapter Summary

aubade (french) : a love song, usually sung at dawn

Will takes a breath around the unlit cigarette, teeth sinking shallowly into the moistened paper. He mutters his thanks as he passes the stranger's jacket back to him, watching as the man stands and stretches. The sun has long set over Baltimore, a frigid chill setting in thick and heavy. It was an easier day, one where breath came quick and deep and his heart thrummed slow and deliberate under his skin. The Sick, as he calls it, as it exists beyond him, hovers just behind his shoulders lying in wait. The smell of the gentleman on the balcony clings to his scrubs, threading through his hair, a pleasantly dull aroma (cigars, brandy, the wild smell of a restless man) ebbing and flowing on the draft blowing up through the trees. Before the man disappears, he bends at the waist over the cigarette, a lighter half-poised between his thumb and forefinger. He nods, a quick jerk of his chin and the man with lingering eyes singes the edges with his white-blue flame. Will feels footsteps rising from the corridor and coming up behind him, but he does not stop the man from continuing. He lifts his gaze through his lashes, breathing the same burnt air as The Man with Lingering Eyes. He would recognize the measured gait anywhere and sick satisfaction unfurls deep in his chest. He ducks his head, curling into the small light cast by the glowing cherry, his fingers loosening from around the cigarette to brush over The Man with Lingering Eyes' knuckles. Teasing. His tongue darts out to moisten his bottom lip before he shifts away, crossing one leg over the other as the gentleman tips his head in parting. Will has already begun counting.

He hollows his cheeks, letting the ashen cloud burn his lungs before exhaling through his nose. Sickening pride swells in his throat, strengthening as Hannibal's envious rage reflects haughtily between his ribs. He rolls the filter in his white fingers, hesitating, feigning ignorance of his companion's presence. The wait is drawing out long enough, too much static when Will is sure that Hannibal has something to say. He hums to himself.

He starts at the feeling of cold fingertips dragging slowly down the length of his neck. The hand curls into a loose fist, tracing its forefingers in broad stripes, inching closer to his trachea. Hannibal's other hand grips a handful of Will's hair, tightening his hold to bed his head back against the back of the bench. The hand at his neck flattens, fingers and thumb tightening over his carotids. It strengthens its grasp, tight enough now to hinder his breathing. Will's eyes flutter shut, a helpless smile tugging his lips. He draws in a half-breath of smoke, immediately cut off by a sharp squeeze of his throat. He lets it go with a strangled laugh.

Hannibal's breath comes hot against the skin behind his ear, lips pressing the words directly to his flesh.

"You don't smoke."

"Not around you."

Will's smile deepens with the flaring of Hannibal's wicked temper, the slight tensing of his fingers around his throat.

"I see."

Goosebumps skitter across his skin as Hannibal traces the path of his jugular with his nose. Will is certain the scent of the Man with the Lingering Eyes has seeped into his skin, bled into his clothes like a reckless perfumed reminder of his almost-infidelity. Will's hand circles the wrist pressing into his collarbone, not to pry it away, just to rest

"Close, but not quite," Hannibal mutters against his skin. "Eau de Vert Eau de Parfum, expensive." He sighs the last word as an afterthought, mostly to himself. The thought of tasting the frantic pulse racing just a hair's breadth away from his teeth (the bright copper burst of feverish blood flooding between his teeth) is too much: his teeth clamp down just a millimeter shy of Will's carotid. Hannibal's lips part, forming a hot suction to the junction between his neck and shoulder, a stark contrast to the sudden white-hot flash of Hannibal's teeth sinking into his neck. Will can't catch the alarmed gasping whine, the involuntary tensing of his hand.

"Hannibal-"

"My dear," he sighs, tongue curling over his bottom lip. Will's lips part on a cry, the pain sizzling quickly into too-sharp pleasure. Too much, too quickly - he needs *more*.

"*Hannibal*-" he means to sound urgent, his fingernails digging into the soft flesh of his own palm.

"Will." His voice sounds much too even, too steady for the weight of blood on his tongue. Will imagines a silvery iron ribbon cast in clay over the violently vivid copper rust of Hannibal's voice. The tides change within him, forcing his sails to take new direction.

"In another life, I would want him," Will says. "In a corner-market in an Italian port town, I would want him. To come home to him in the living room, windows thrown open to catch late-afternoon sun and him, feet up on the coffee table, a glass of white wine in hand. He would rise to greet me, I would run my fingers through his hair. We would sleep on opposing ends of the same bed, or not sleep at all. I would wake first, to admire the marks he would have left-" a low growl escapes Hannibal's lips, the thought of another set of hands on him - however improbable - turning his vision burgundy. Will struggles to breathe through the ever-increasing vice grip around his neck, his voice low with effort. "-I would press my fingertips to the lighter marks, forcing them to ache like I want them to. They would fit so easily under a collared shirt. It would be normal, perfectly mundane-" his voice dissolves into a high keening gasp as he arches into the next bite to the sweet spot just above his shoulder blade. "Eventually, you and I would meet, trade cigarettes on a park bench, with me borrowing your jacket for warmth. The only difference is that when I give it back to you, the foreign scent clinging to its fur lining would be of him. You would never know the difference."

"You are infuriating," Hannibal murmurs. "In this moment, I could rupture your trachea without a second's hesitation."

"You won't."

//—/Not to me but to the man who has already sealed his fate, the Man With the Lingering Eyes who won't survive the night.

"You sound very certain."

Thousands of images flash through Will's mind like a stop-motion film of his own demise. He is in over his head, he is too far out to come back unscathed. Hannibal is the picture of practiced calm, Will can feel his face slip behind the crafted mask of faux-indifference.

"You wouldn't kill me this way."

"Enlighten me, dear Will, how would I do it?"

an update, not a chapter

When I began writing this story, I was a senior in high school, preparing for an intensive pre-med program at a major university in my state. I was seventeen then, young and wholly unaware of how many turns my life would take over the next three years. Without my knowing, the third anniversary of my hiatus passed in March. Three years have gone by and the person who writes this update is another being, a lifetime away from the girl who started this. I'm graduating next year and while I'm sorry to say I'm no longer in medicine, I'm overjoyed to have found my calling, my passion is elsewhere, in archaeology, in history, in the study of the ancients. I'm engaged now to the love of my life, I've seen so much more of life than I did then, and I cannot thank you all enough for what you've given me through this story.

I'm here to say it will be finished.

This is a goal of mine for the summer ahead, one I fully intend on keeping. I have not forgotten this, nor will I, and I hope that the chapters coming next live up to those already posted. So, this is not goodbye. I'll see you all soon with a real update, hopefully within the week.

Cheers!

ledtherevolution

contrahere

Chapter Summary

contrahere (n): middle french, to draw together

tw: knifeplay, blood drinking

Chapter Notes

me: says i'm going to finish this

also me: takes a two year hiatus (again) to realize that hannibal is a vampire

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

There's something wrong with Dr. Lecter. Will knew – no, suspected, before any of their intimate encounters had even begun. There's something about him, something...off. He is going to get himself killed, truly, if he is not careful.

When the morning news picks up the story of the dead man on a rural mountain road, Will could not be further from the faintest feeling of concern. He knew, he'd always known. It is not a secret that Hannibal plays God. Everyone watches him do it – day in, day out, bringing souls back from the point of no return. He's as careful as the ferryman himself, his hands too practiced, too finely honed for it to be purely a mortal gift. Naturally, such power demands fair payment. That's what it is in the end, a balancing of scales tipped too far. That is something familiar, something understood – life for life. He'd seen this very thing cycle in and out of the ER on an hourly basis, what about *this* would have him running for the hills?

Under the cover of dark, lying awake and alone in the hour before his alarm sounds, Will's mind wanders that familiar path back to the night before. He wonders what it would be like to lay under his blade, to be bled from the heart just for Hannibal's own pleasure. It would make for the gentlest passage into life beyond – if Hannibal would let him go that far. His heart thrums with thready echoes of excitement. There is a soft bruise under Will's jaw, barely noticeable with sight alone but he feels it with each turn of his head, each swallow. If he'd known that a cigarette would have brought so much heat to his touch, so much fire in his eyes, he would have picked one up ages ago.

After taking Laika on her morning walk, Will dresses for work methodically. Every piece was tucked together deliberately. It is what he wears every day, but he is careful in his movements so as not have so much as a string out of place. He polishes his glasses on the inside of his sleeve, clips his ID badge to his pocket. He walks the long way to work, choosing to leave his

car behind. The snow on the ground is melting, tramped down into long strips of translucent ice along the sidewalk. Weeds peek up through the cracks, low green growth between patches of wet.

Hannibal is already busy with paperwork by the time Will darkens his doorstep. He glances up briefly at first, then with more intent – scanning over his body with something he can only describe as hunger, like he’s something to eat. Will doesn’t balk. He steadies his body, his hands limp at his sides. He offers nothing.

“Will, good morning.” Hannibal says, his teeth running over his bottom lip. Begrudgingly, he shifts his focus back to the work at hand. “There’s a letter for you.” How convenient, Will thinks to himself, slowly approaching the desk. He lifts the envelope that was strategically placed closest to him. Addressed from the university back in Baton Rouge, it must be something to do with graduation documentation, something tedious and easily discarded into the biohazard bin. He plucks up the letter opener and in one motion, slices the paper open and deliberately into the soft pad of his thumb. It’s deep, deep enough for the thought of sutures to cross his mind, but he holds himself completely still. Hannibal’s nose wrinkles. *Caught you.*

“Shit,” he breathes, the picture of concern. Will finally moves to clean the wound with his mouth, but Hannibal is faster than him. He is up in a flash, his hand circling Will’s wrist as tight as a vice. He watches the crimson blood well up over the cut, bleed down the shallow basin of his palm and the tender space of his inner wrist. His nostrils flare, his eyes slitted and dark – Hannibal is a wildfire and if he isn’t careful... Hannibal holds him completely still, his body as unmoving as stone. He tears himself away, slowly – reaching back behind him for a tissue. Will makes a noise of protest, deep in his throat. The letter opener is still held loosely by his right hand, the blade bloodied from his own wound. “Have you ever considered,” he breathes, slotting his body even closer to Hannibal’s, “what it could be, for you to indulge?”

The red in Hannibal’s eyes stands out among the green and brown, almost glowing – though Will can’t entirely be sure that’s not a trick of his subconscious, seeing what he wants more than anything to see. Hannibal’s mouth parts, his breath coming in quick and shallow. Can he taste it? The scent of Will’s blood in the warm air between them. His wound aches, but he pays it little attention. A perfect circle of blood drops down onto Hannibal’s own hand and the game is over – curtains called, stage lights out, the backlit neon signs flickering out.

Hannibal’s hands are on him in an instant, driving him back against the wall. His hand curls around his head as not to hurt him – not there, anyway, then descends to his neck. He braces his bleeding hand over Will’s head, his palm pressing the fragile bones of his wrist into the wall. Hannibal tugs the collar of his thermal shirt to the side, nearly ripping it along its seam with the force of his movements. The hand in his hair tightens to the point of pain, tilting his head far enough to make the tendons in his neck stand out. Hannibal noses along the column of his throat, searching out the best space to mark him.

“You have no idea,” he growls, his breath coming out in shallow pants, “how delicious you are to me.” Will can only give a small, quiet moan of approval. “If you cannot be quiet, dear Will,” he says, “I must gag you.” All the blood rushes from his head, the idea of being pressed into the wall, his supervisor’s thigh wedged between his legs, cloth wedged in his

mouth to keep him quiet – *christ*. Hannibal’s teeth sink into the tender skin of his neck, sharp and bruising. Pain lances through him at the contact, each gasp punctuated with an unmade sound of agony. Hannibal mouths at him, his hand tightening ever further in his hair. The initial searing pain settles into something...different, warm, smooth – like honey in his veins. Will sags against him, biting into his lip to keep from whimpering from the overstimulation. Hannibal’s fingers press urgently into the juncture of his wrist, taking his pulse, Will realizes belatedly. Several minutes pass, Hannibal only reluctantly pulling away once the room starts spinning and Will’s vision darkening. He feels his faint, thready pulse echo through the tender space of his scalp where Hannibal had him pinned.

Hannibal catches him as he begins to slip, hauling him up and into one of the office chairs. Blood runs from both corners of his mouth – either that, or he is seeing double. Will lets his head fall back against the chair, unable to bring himself to feel anything other than floating, endless contentment. His lids are heavy, blackness pulling at his consciousness. Hannibal kneels before him, brushing his sweaty hair from his eyes.

“Sleep, Will.” He murmurs. “What a gift you are to me.”

Will wakes with a start, alone in Hannibal’s office. An orange fleece hospital blanket is draped over him, his body having been deposited on the chaise Hannibal only rarely ever used. With trembling fingers, he reaches up to his throat to assess the damage, but is only met with smooth tape and gauze. Hannibal cleaned his skin, possibly even gave him stitches with the way the skin seems to pull when he moves, but his scrubs did not escape unscathed. A deep patch of dark red stains the neck of his thermal shirt, which also leached heavily into his scrub shirt. He swallows thickly, his mouth dry and sticky. Christ, he needs water. Maybe one of those juice containers they keep for diabetic patients. He can’t get further down into his thoughts though, the door creaking open. Will sits up slowly, a hand pressed to his head to steady himself.

Hannibal practically read his mind. In each hand, he carries the same little barrels of orange juice and a wrapped sandwich from the canteen. He drags a chair to Will’s bedside, placing the juice and sandwich on the nearby table.

“I have a shift today,” Will says hoarsely, blinking the remnants of sleep from his eyes.

“I let the hospital know you have taken ill,” he says. His eyes are sharp but calm. He’s changed his scrubs, his hair neatly combed back into place. “How are you, Will?”

“Fine.” He fidgets with the edge of the fleece, eyes trailed on Hannibal’s hands. “I – well.” He clears his throat, shifting restlessly. “I liked it.” A look passes briefly across his features, like the words are almost painful to listen to. Will, for once, either from blood loss or exhaustion cannot see any further passed his façade – the Geiger counter’s dead.

“It took considerable effort to stop.” he says, slowly. “A considerable effort I was nearly unable to expend.” For whatever reason, the words don’t make him nervous – they don’t even

register as something he should be apprehensive about. That tenuous hold he had on what little self-preservation he had was gone, slipped through his fingers the moment he sliced his thumb open.

“I know.” He sighed, shoving the blankets off him. “It’s a risk I accept. I know you do, too.” Hannibal’s face pinches, but he does not deny it. “You asked, before,” Will begins, standing from the chaise on unsteady feet. “How I thought you would do it – it’s this.” He retrieves the cleaned letter opener from the desk, his heart thudding desperately in his chest. He drags the blunted end across Hannibal’s inner forearm, left side – then right. “Take your time,” he murmurs, circling around to the back of his chair. He crouches, his chin at the juncture of Hannibal’s neck and shoulder. He presses the letter opener to Hannibal’s breastbone, over his layers of scrubs. Here, everything was in sharp, unending focus. His desires lined up before him, shining like foiled candies, and he was going to choose it for himself. “You would do it carefully, slow in the bloodletting, to truly savor it.” He mouths along Hannibal’s ear, one hand pressed flush to the broad expanse of his chest, the other slowly bringing the blade to Hannibal’s throat. “Before the final *push*.” Will knows, intimately, that Hannibal could trade positions with him in half a heartbeat, kill him before the letter opener even hits the floor. But Hannibal doesn’t move, he’s not even breathing, his fingers digging divots into the wood of the armrests. “I see it, and I’ll let you.” He whispers, tightening the hold on the blade. “But you must promise me something.”

“Anything.” Hannibal’s mouth hardly moves when he speaks, his voice low.

“Never take another.” He bites along his neck, a facsimile of the wounds he carries. “Not while I live, not after I am dead. *Never*.” Hannibal finally moves. Rising from the chair in one swift motion and gathers Will in his arms. He buries his face in his neck, breathing in the still-lingering scent of blood under the gauze.

“None can hold a candle to you, Will.” He murmurs. “You have my word, and my fidelity.”

Chapter End Notes

well everyone, it's been seven long years and it's time to finally close this chapter. I appreciate all of your support for the many years it took to write. I worked on a way to make it feel remotely satisfying and - well, this is it. Maybe there will be an epilogue, maybe not, but for now - it's time to let this part go.

If you've stuck through this from the beginning, I can't thank you enough. I'm so grateful for all the comments & kudos over the years.

I've added trigger warnings & am editing some of the earlier chapters but for the most part, it's finally finished.

Cheers <3

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